# HOZUKI'S COOLHEADEDNESS

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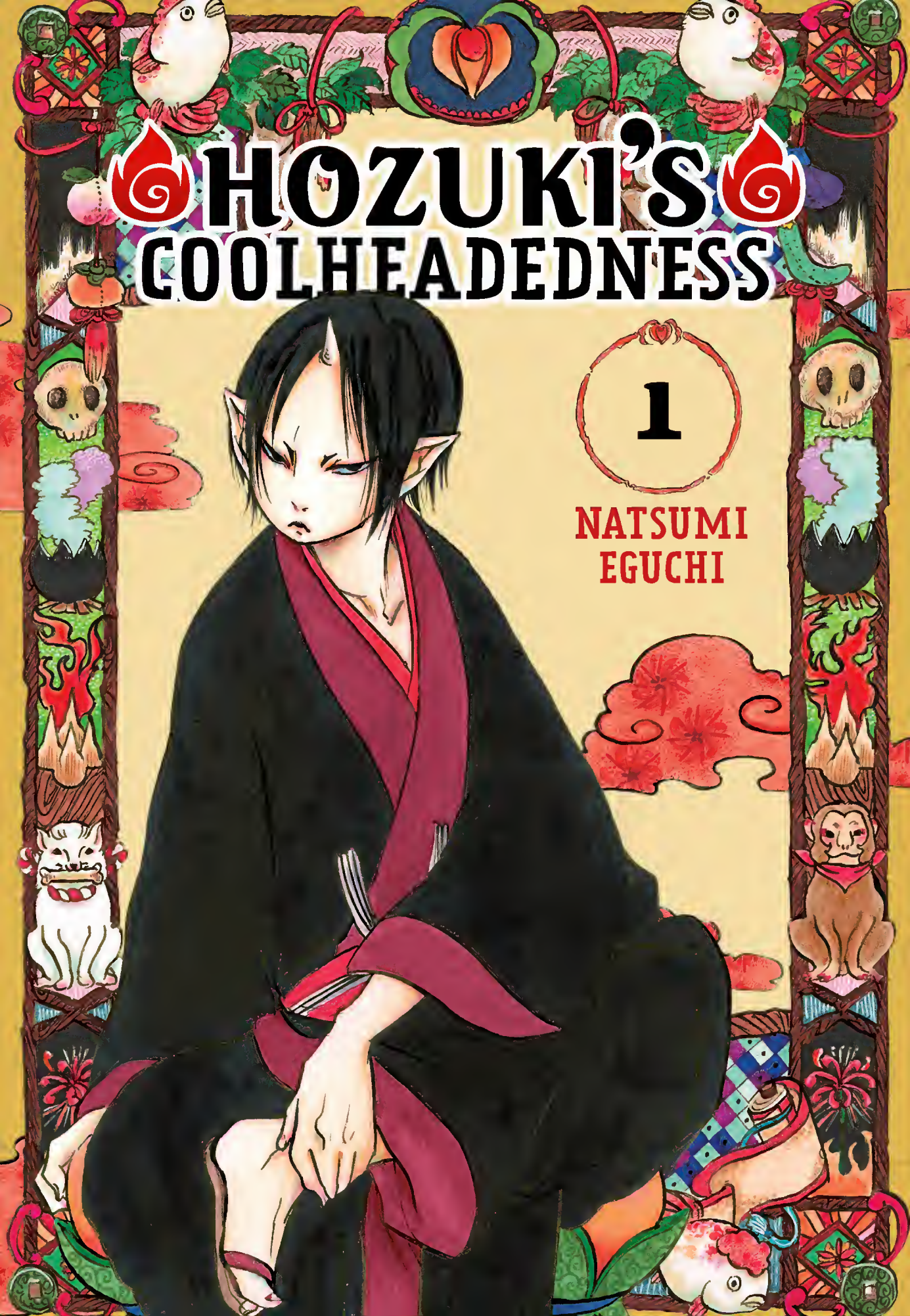
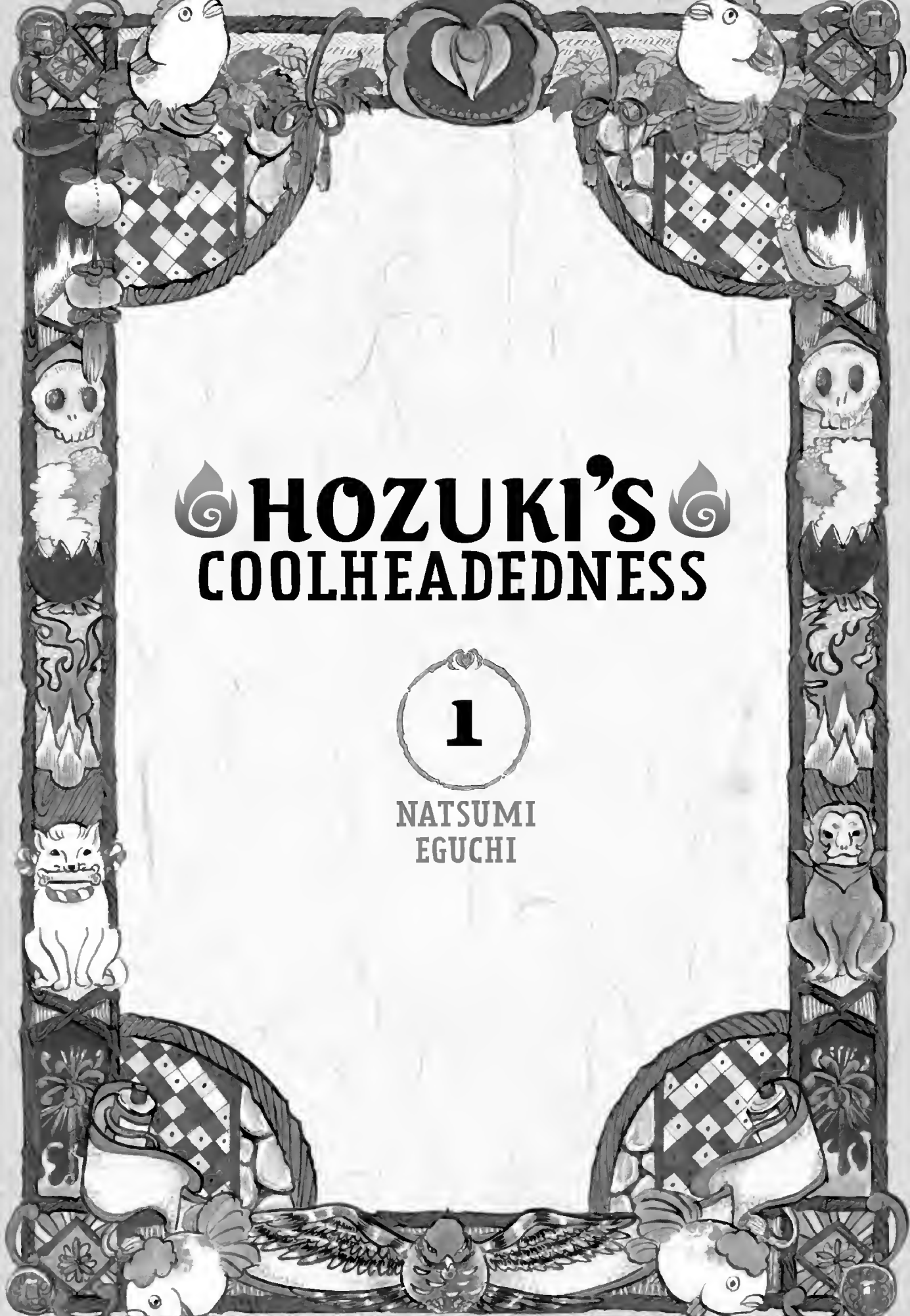
NATSUMI ESUKI





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NATSUMI
EGUCHI

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HOZUKI NO REITETSU
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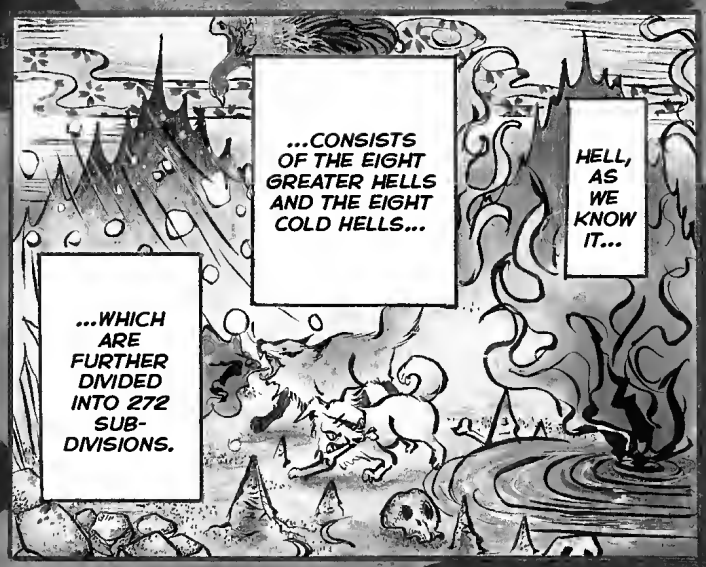
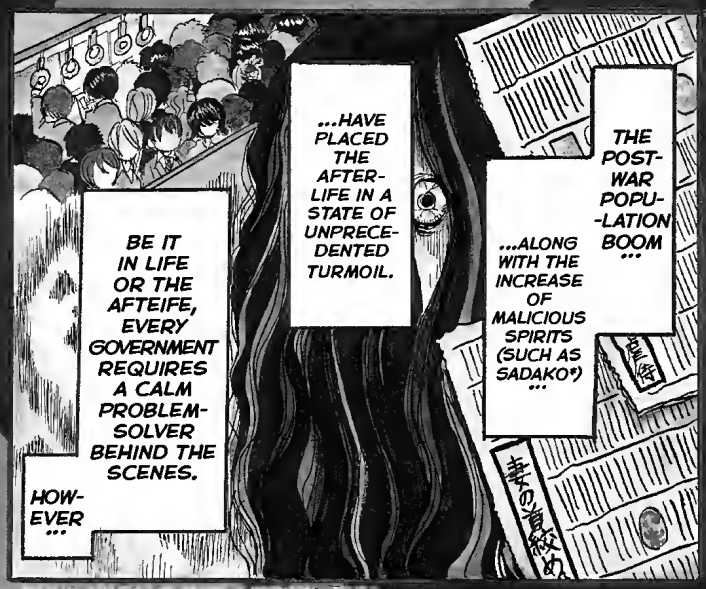
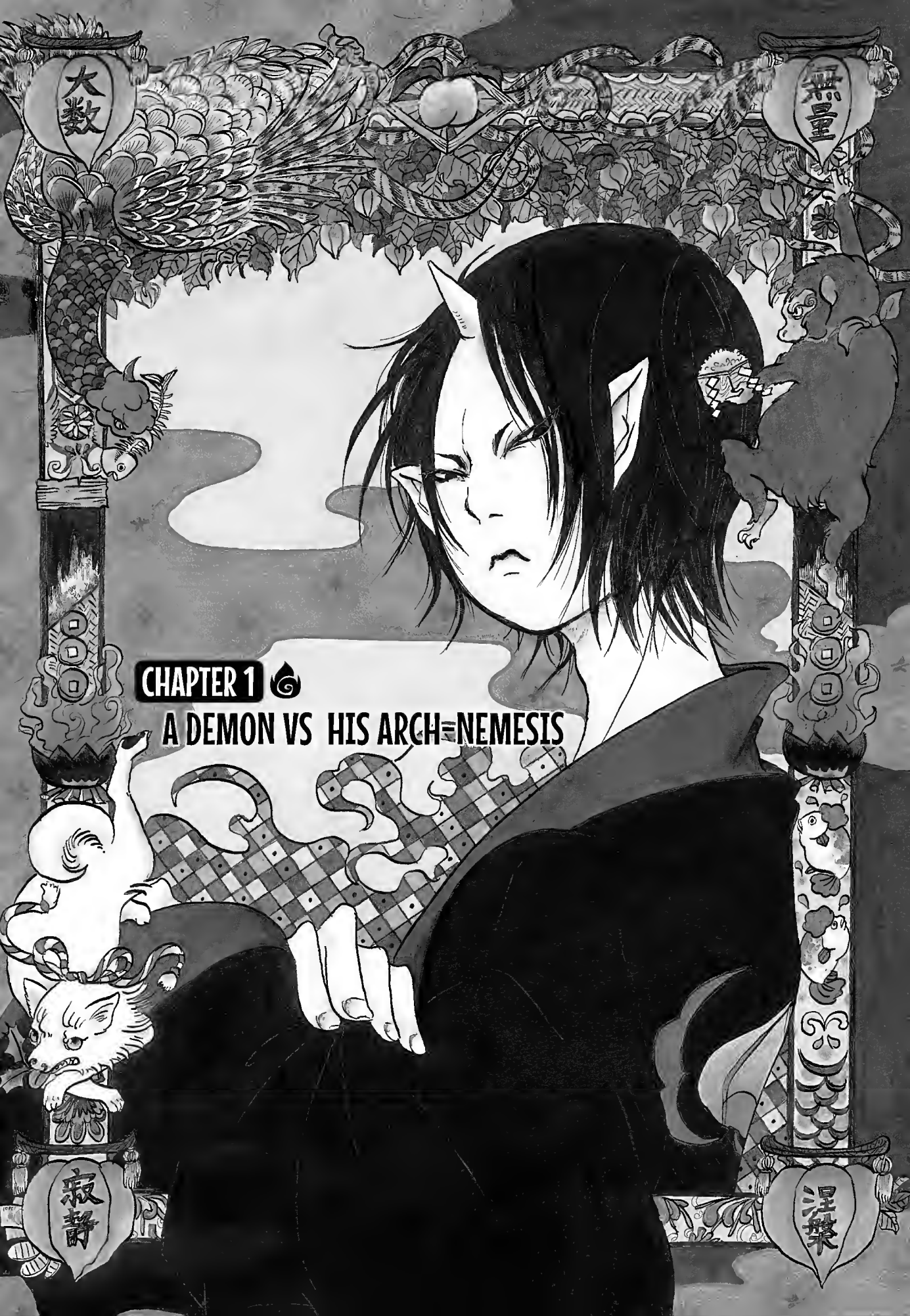
※ ATTENTION:
THIS MANGA IS A WORK OF FICTION, BUT HELL MIGHT ACTUALLY EXIST. BE CAUTIOUS OF HOW YOU ACT DURING LIFE.


HELL, AS WE KNOW IT...
...CONSISTS OF THE EIGHT GREATER HELLS AND THE EIGHT COLD HELLS...
...WHICH ARE FURTHER DIVIDED INTO 272 SUB-DIVISIONS.


THE POST-WAR POPU--LATION BOOM ...
...ALONG WITH THE INCREASE OF MALICIOUS SPIRITS (SUCH AS SADAKO*) ...
...HAVE PLACED THE AFTER-LIFE IN A STATE OF UNPRECE-DENTED TURMOIL.
BE IT IN LIFE OR THE AFTEIFE, EVERY GOVERNMENT REQUIRES A CALM PROBLEM-SOLVER BEHIND THE SCENES.
HOW-EVER ...

* SADAKO: SPIRIT POPULARIZED BY THE RING SERIES

...SUCH HEROES OF THE SHADOWS ARE FAR MORE RARE THAN CHARISMATIC FIGURES.

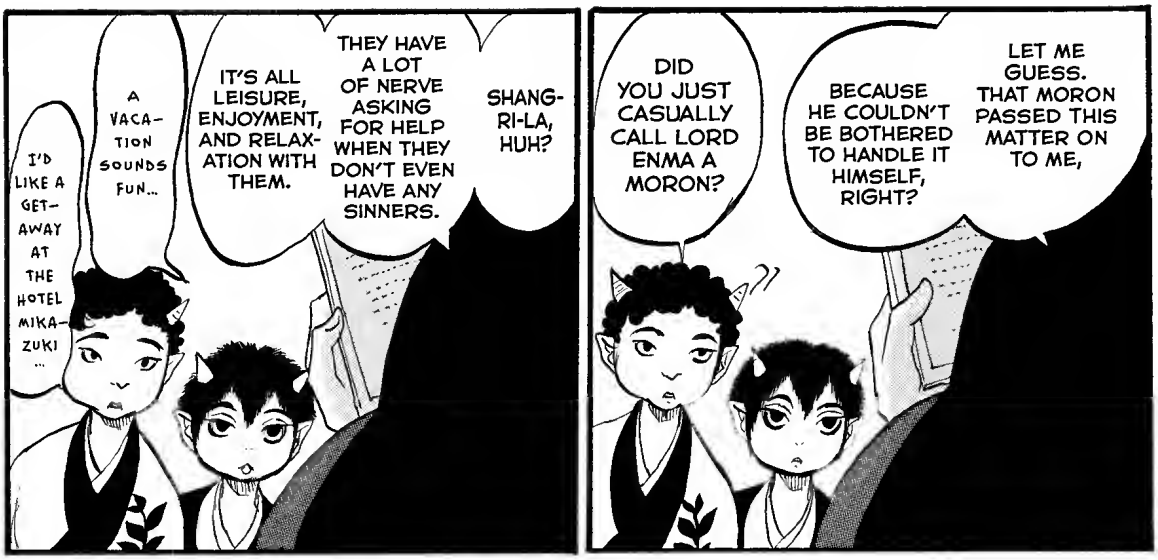



# CHAPTER 1

## A DEMON VS HIS ARCH-NEMESIS

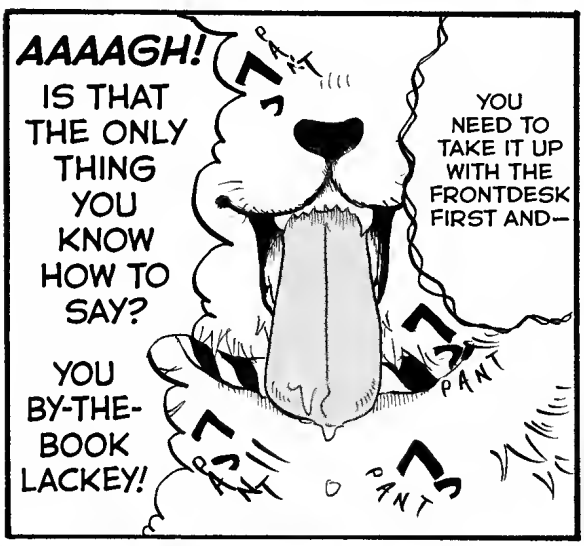
LORD ENMA!
THE RIVER IN INTER-MINABLE HELL IS OVER-FLOWING!
WE'VE RECEIVED A REQUEST FROM HEAVEN...
BLACK ROPE HELL IS ON THE VERGE OF ECONOMIC COLLAPSE!
LORD ENMA! A FRESH LOAD OF DEAD IS IN!
AHH! WE'RE UP TO OUR NECKS AS IT IS!
MY LORD, THIS CLAUSE STATES THAT "THOSE WHO BURN DOWN AN ORCHARD SHALL BE VICIOUSLY BEATEN WITH SUGAR-CANE." IT'S A BIT OUT-DATED. I SUG-GEST WE REVISE IT.
SLAP SLAP SLAP
THIS HELL REALLY EXISTS.
UHH... UM...
INTERMINABLE HELL IS AN ORDINANCE-DESIGNATED HELL, RIGHT? LET THEM FIGURE IT OUT.
I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHAT HEAVEN WANTS. TAKE IT UP WITH HOZUKI-KUN.
PANIC
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT.. WHERE IS HOZUKI-SAMA?
HE'S OUT DOING INSPEC-TIONS.
HE'S GETTING PULLED EVERY WHICH WAY WITH HOW BUSY WE'VE BEEN.
glance

EVERY-THING CHECKS OUT AT MT. PIN-CUSHION.
HO-ZUKI-SA-MA!
HEAVEN'S SHANGRI-LA SENT A REQUEST FOR MORE MAN-POWER!
FLIP FLIP
THEY'RE UNDER-STAFFED.
HOW ARE THINGS IN ANIMAL TORTURER HELL?
ANIMAL TORTURER HELL: A LESSER HELL WHERE SUFFERERS HAVE THEIR BODIES PICKED TO THE BONE BY BEASTS.
HEY! WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING. DON'T BUTT IN!
WE CAN'T BE EXPECTED TO PICK UP THE SLACK FOR HEAVEN, TOO.


I'D LIKE A GET-AWAY AT THE HOTEL MIKAZUKI...
A VACATION SOUNDS FUN...
IT'S ALL LEISURE, ENJOYMENT, AND RELAXATION WITH THEM.
THEY HAVE A LOT OF NERVE ASKING FOR HELP WHEN THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE ANY SINNERS.
SHANGRI-LA, HUH?
DID YOU JUST CASUALLY CALL LORD ENMA A MORON?
BECAUSE HE COULDN'T BE BOTHERED TO HANDLE IT HIMSELF, RIGHT?
LET ME GUESS. THAT MORON PASSED THIS MATTER ON TO ME,

EVERY LITTLE THING ENDS UP ON MY DESK.

LIKE I SAID!

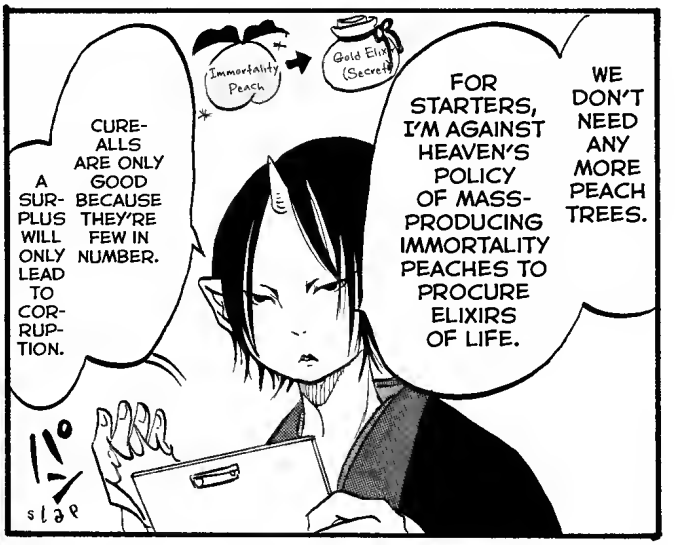

AAAAGH!
IS THAT THE ONLY THING YOU KNOW HOW TO SAY?
YOU BY-THE-BOOK LACKEY!
YOU NEED TO TAKE IT UP WITH THE FRONTDESK FIRST AND—
PANT
PANT
PANT

I CAN'T DO THAT, SIR!
BRING ME YOUR TOUGHEST GUY!
PANT
PANT

RAGGLE
RAGGLE
GET HIM, WILL YA? WE CAN'T HANDLE THIS BY OURSELVES.
YEAH. I THINK HE'S HERE ON INSPECTION.
HUH? OH...
HEY, ISN'T HOZUKI-SAMA HERE NOW?

HELP FOR THE PEACH FARM?

HMM. I SUPPOSE MAINTE-NANCE IS NECESSARY, BUT...
SO THE SCENERY NEEDS TO BE KEPT UP.
BUT SHANGRI-LA IS ALSO HEAVEN'S BIGGEST TOURIST TRAP,
bblc
うだ

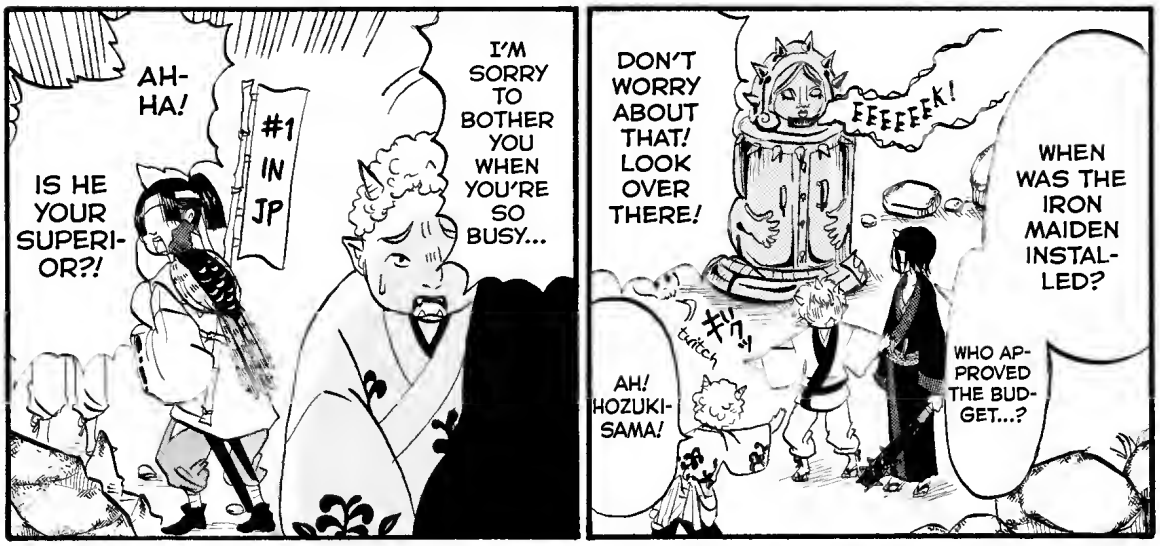

Immortality Peach
Gold Elixir (Secret)
A SUR-PLUS WILL ONLY LEAD TO COR-RUP-TION.
CURE-ALLS ARE ONLY GOOD BECAUSE THEY'RE FEW IN NUMBER.
FOR STARTERS, I'M AGAINST HEAVEN'S POLICY OF MASS-PRODUCING IMMORTALITY PEACHES TO PROCURE ELIXIRS OF LIFE.
WE DON'T NEED ANY MORE PEACH TREES.
パン
slap

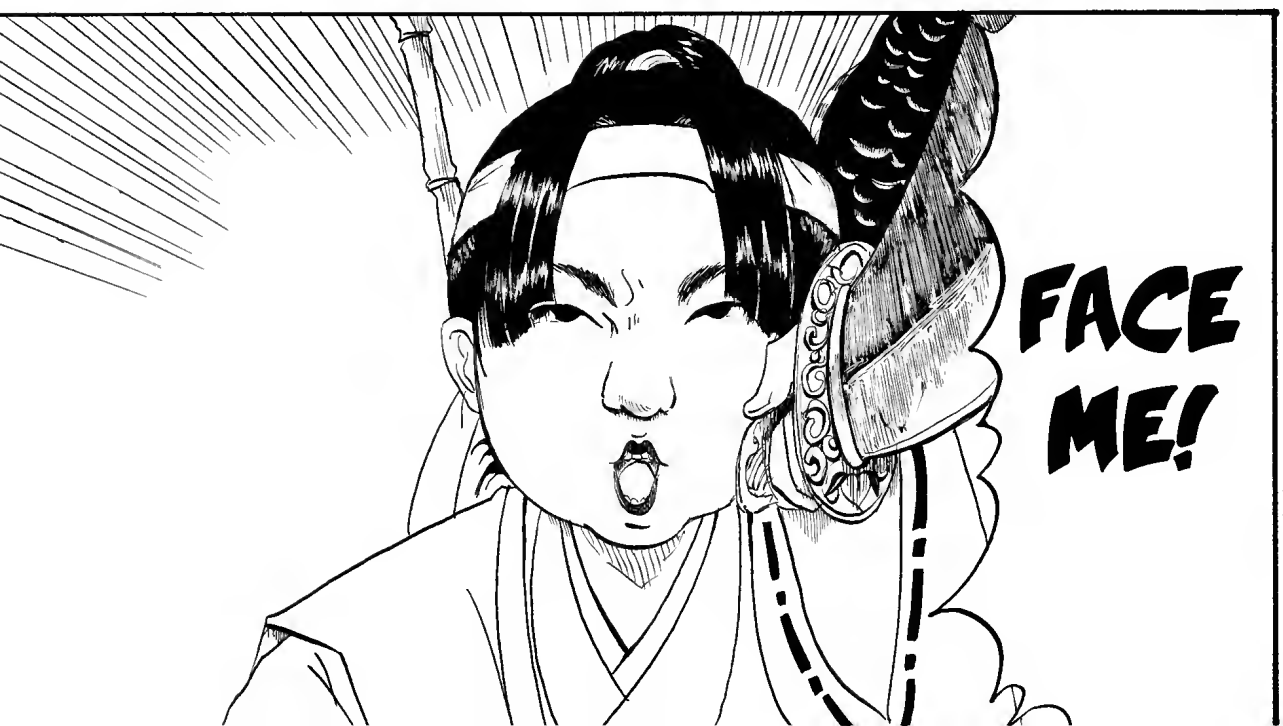
HOZUKI-SAMAAA!
だだっ
rap
rap
AT ANY RATE, THEY'D LIKE US TO SEND SOMEONE FOR WEED DUTY.

* A FESTIVAL IN WHICH LOVED ONES HONOR THE DEAD WITH OFFERINGS AND DANCE.

UM... I DON'T THINK HE'S HERE WITH OFFERINGS FOR THE BON FESTIVAL.
DIVINELY SWEET!
AMATERASU APPROVED IMMORTALITY PEACHES
A BOY IS HERE WITH PEACH-ES?
WE DON'T WANT ANY.

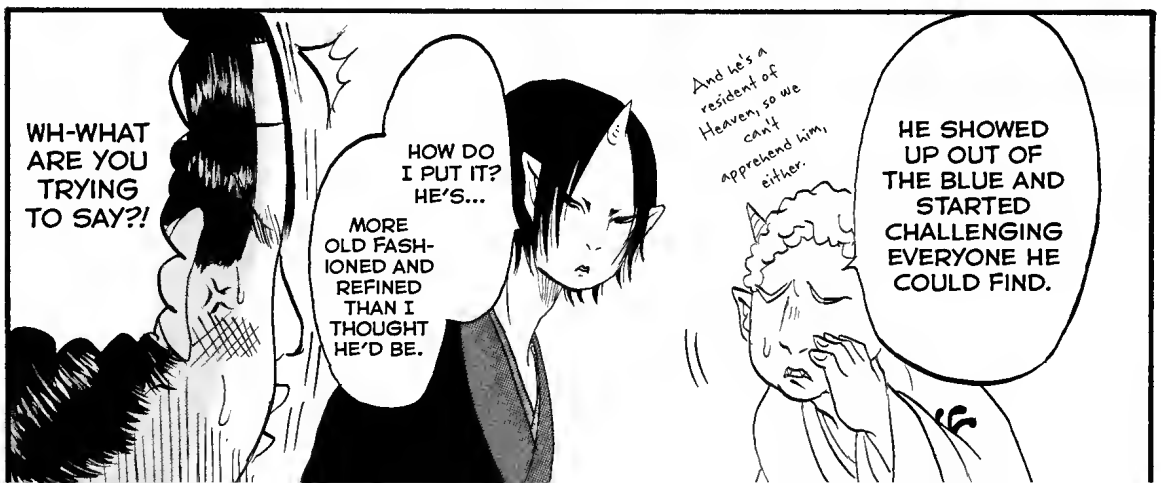
* A JAPANESE FOLKLORE HERO, BORN FROM A PEACH AND SLAYER OF OGRES.



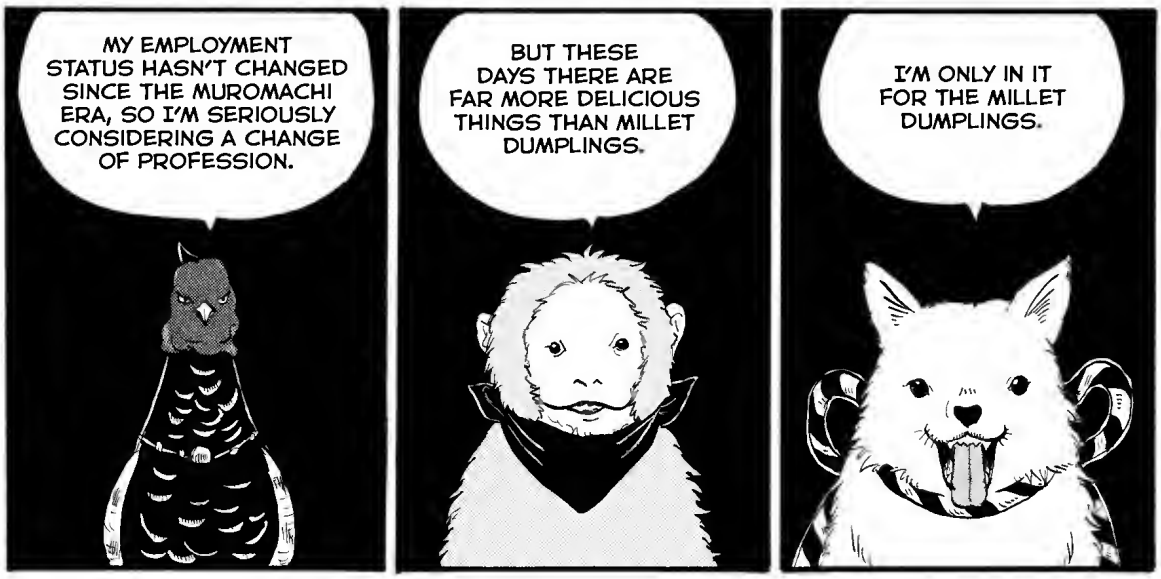



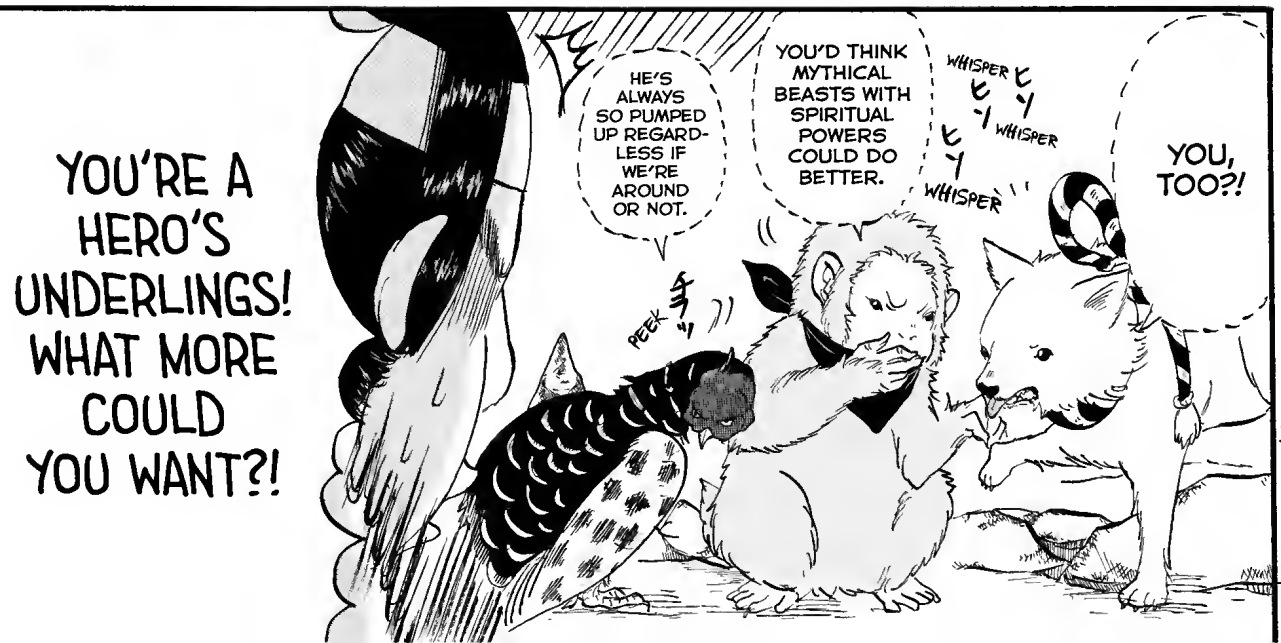
#1 IN JP

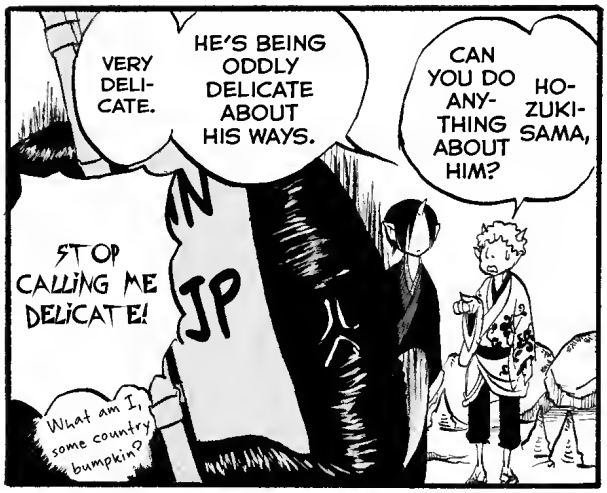
STOP WHISPERING!
HE'S THAT MOMO-TARO FELLOW.
WHERE DID THIS PAIN IN THE NECK COME FROM?
UHH...

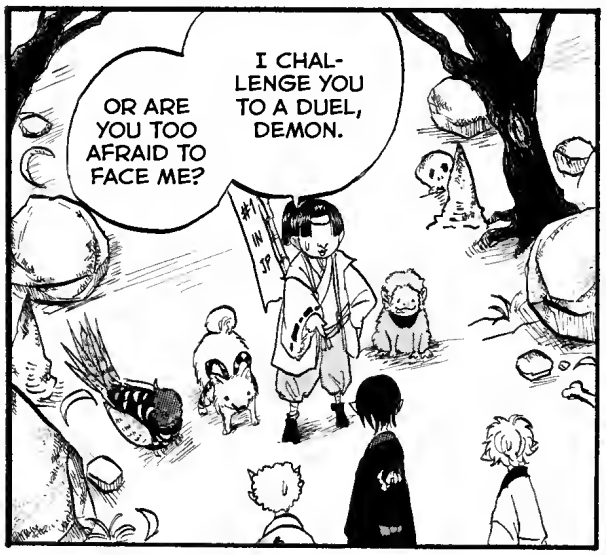

WH-WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY?!
HOW DO I PUT IT? HE'S...
MORE OLD FASH-IONED AND REFINED THAN I THOUGHT HE'D BE.
And he's a resident of Heaven, so we can't apprehend him, either.
HE SHOWED UP OUT OF THE BLUE AND STARTED CHALLENGING EVERYONE HE COULD FIND.

I THINK IT'S FINE TO BE PROUD OF RIDDING THE LAND OF EVIL OGRES DURING YOUR LIFETIME,
BUT HAVEN'T YOU LOST SIGHT OF YOUR NOBLE CAUSE?
フン hmph
NAY!
I'M STILL WORKING FOR MY CAUSE. I AM WHO I AM BECAUSE I FIGHT OGRES.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, PARTNER?

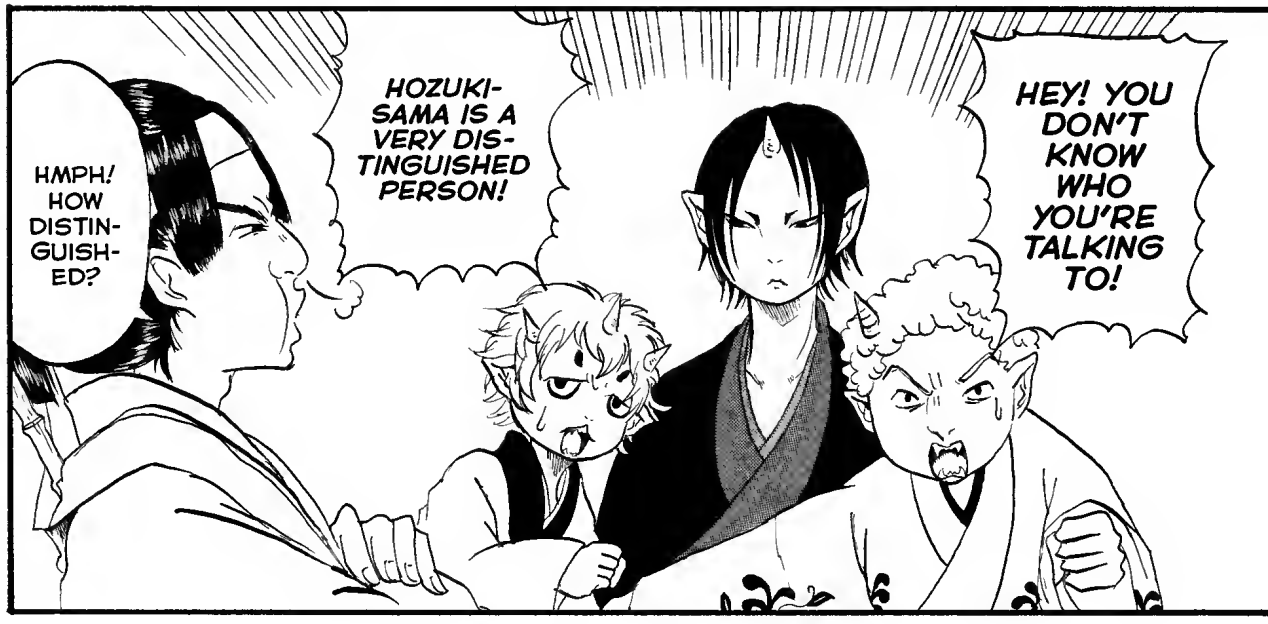

I'M ONLY IN IT FOR THE MILLET DUMPLINGS.
BUT THESE DAYS THERE ARE FAR MORE DELICIOUS THINGS THAN MILLET DUMPLINGS.
MY EMPLOYMENT STATUS HASN'T CHANGED SINCE THE MUROMACHI ERA, SO I'M SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING A CHANGE OF PROFESSION.

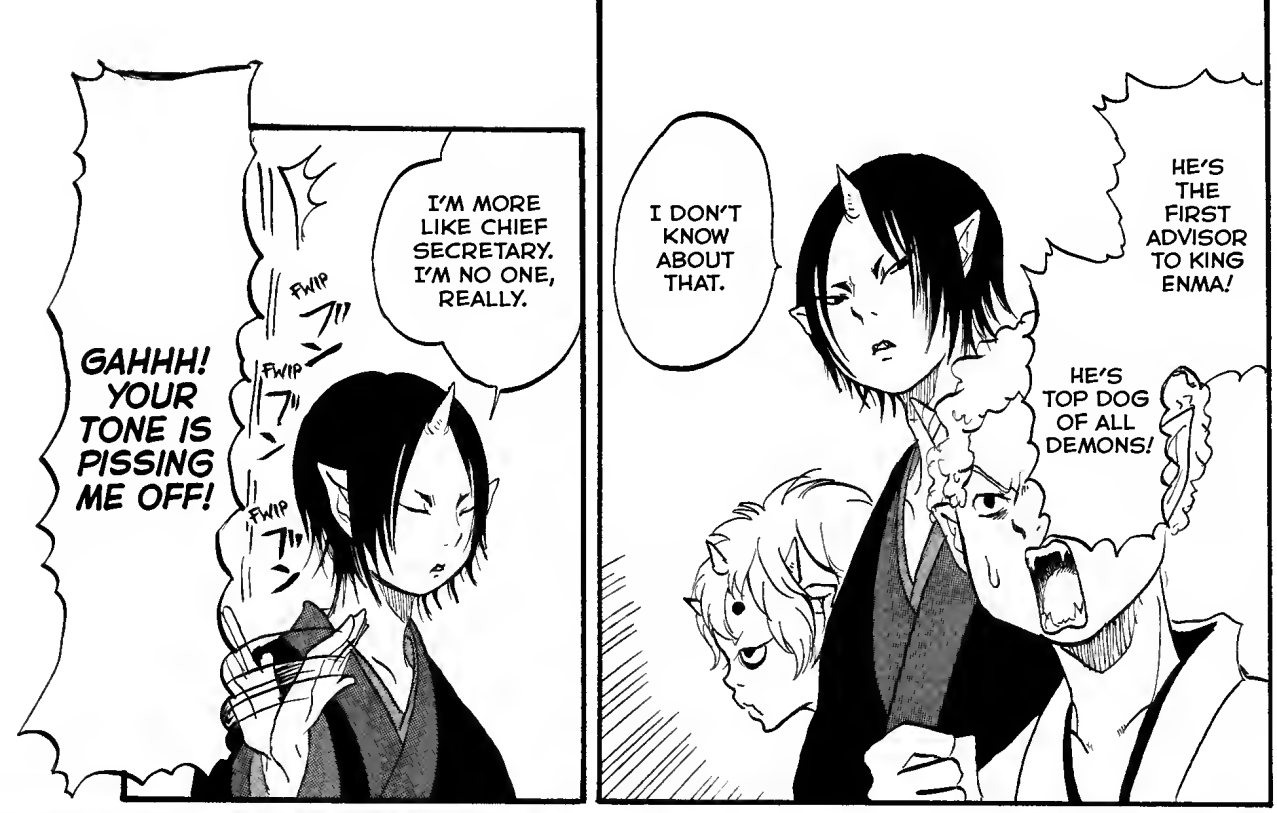

YOU'RE A HERO'S UNDERLINGS! WHAT MORE COULD YOU WANT?!
HE'S ALWAYS SO PUMPED UP REGARDLESS IF WE'RE AROUND OR NOT.
YOU'D THINK MYTHICAL BEASTS WITH SPIRITUAL POWERS COULD DO BETTER.
WHISPER
WHISPER
WHISPER
YOU, TOO?!
PEEK


HE'S BEING ODDLY DELICATE ABOUT HIS WAYS.
VERY DELI-CATE.
CAN YOU DO ANY-THING ABOUT HIM?
HO-ZUKI-SAMA,
STOP CALLING ME DELICATE!
What am I, some country bumpkin?
JP


I CHAL-LENGE YOU TO A DUEL, DEMON.
OR ARE YOU TOO AFRAID TO FACE ME?
#1 IN JP

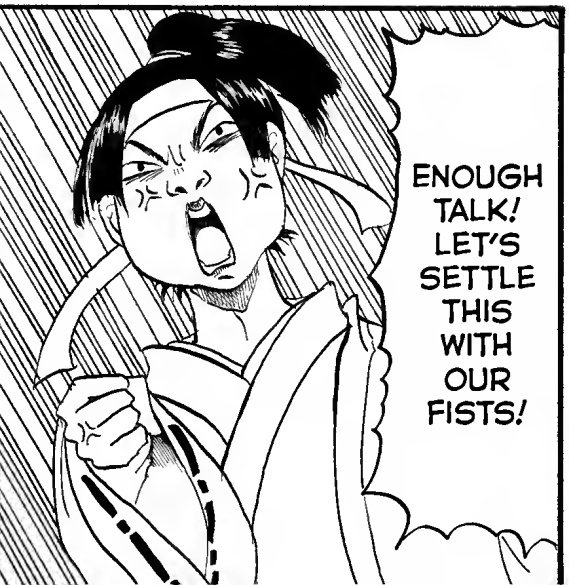
IN OTHER WORDS, YOU'RE LIKE THE ONLY SPORTS-MINDED GUY IN THE OFFICE WHO'S CONSTATNLY ANNOYING HIS COWORKERS.
It's not like he's a bad guy or anything...
Don't know what to do.
DON'T JUST CALMLY ASSESS THE SITUA-TION, OGRE!
I'M A DEMON.


HEY! YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO!
HOZUKI-SAMA IS A VERY DIS-TINGUISHED PERSON!
HMPH! HOW DISTIN-GUISH-ED?


I'M MORE LIKE CHIEF SECRETARY. I'M NO ONE, REALLY.
FWIP
FWIP
FWIP
GAHHH! YOUR TONE IS PISSING ME OFF!
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT.
HE'S THE FIRST ADVISOR TO KING ENMA!
HE'S TOP DOG OF ALL DEMONS!

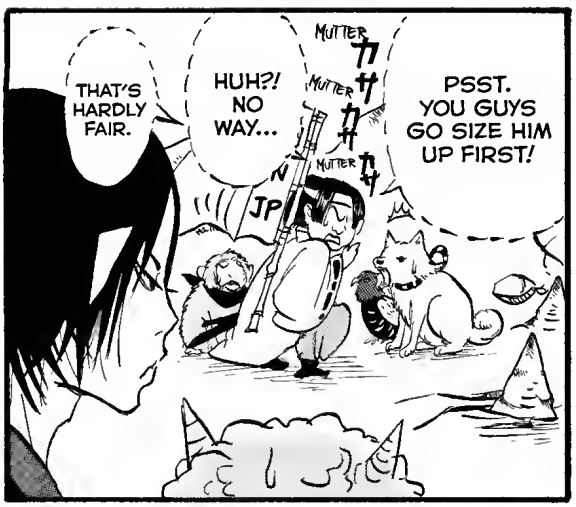
DAMN IT ALL! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, MY MOTHER-- I MEAN, MY GRANDMOTHER?!
PLUS YOU'RE REALLY NO MORE THAN A DRIFTER NOW. WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO SETTLE DOWN?
UNLIKE THOSE THUGS ON OGRE ISLAND, WE WORK OURSELVES TO THE BONE HERE.
I HAVE NO INTENTION OF LOSING TO YOU.

* MOMOTARO ONLY HAS AN ADOPTED GRANDMOTHER.

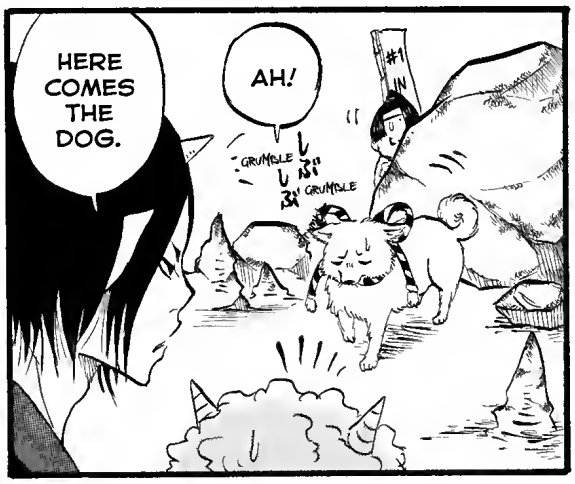


SLAP
ぱん
TWITCH
OH!
IF YOU'RE WILLING TO THROW DOWN, I'D LOVE TO SETTLE THIS BEFORE THE NEXT PAGE.
UHH... ACTUALLY, MAYBE VIOLENCE ISN'T THE ANSWER.
I INSIST. THIS IS HELL, AFTER ALL.

THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME INFIGHTING GOING ON.
#1 IN JP


THAT'S HARDLY FAIR.
HUH?! NO WAY...
PSST. YOU GUYS GO SIZE HIM UP FIRST!
MUTTER
JP

TRY PROVOKING HIM, FOR STARTERS!
YOU GOT THIS, SHIRO!
UGH... I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THIS.
#1 IN
HUH ...?
UHH ...


HERE COMES THE DOG.
AH!
#1 IN
GRUMBLE
GRUMBLE

* MASCOT FEATURED IN COMMERCIALS.

AHHH! SHIRO'S DOWN!
IN JP
But...I wouldn't mind having Aya Ueto for a daughter.
ガビーン SLUMP
LOW BLOW... THAT'S THE ONE THING I DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR.

TEAM BRAINIAC, KAKISUKE THE MONKEY!
AND LURIO, THE ROCKET LAUNCHER PHEASANT!
WE'LL AVENGE OUR FALLEN UNDERDOG, SHIRO!
FLAP
FLAP
YOU FIEND! THAT WAS TOO FAR!
DON'T CALL ME UNDERDOG...!-

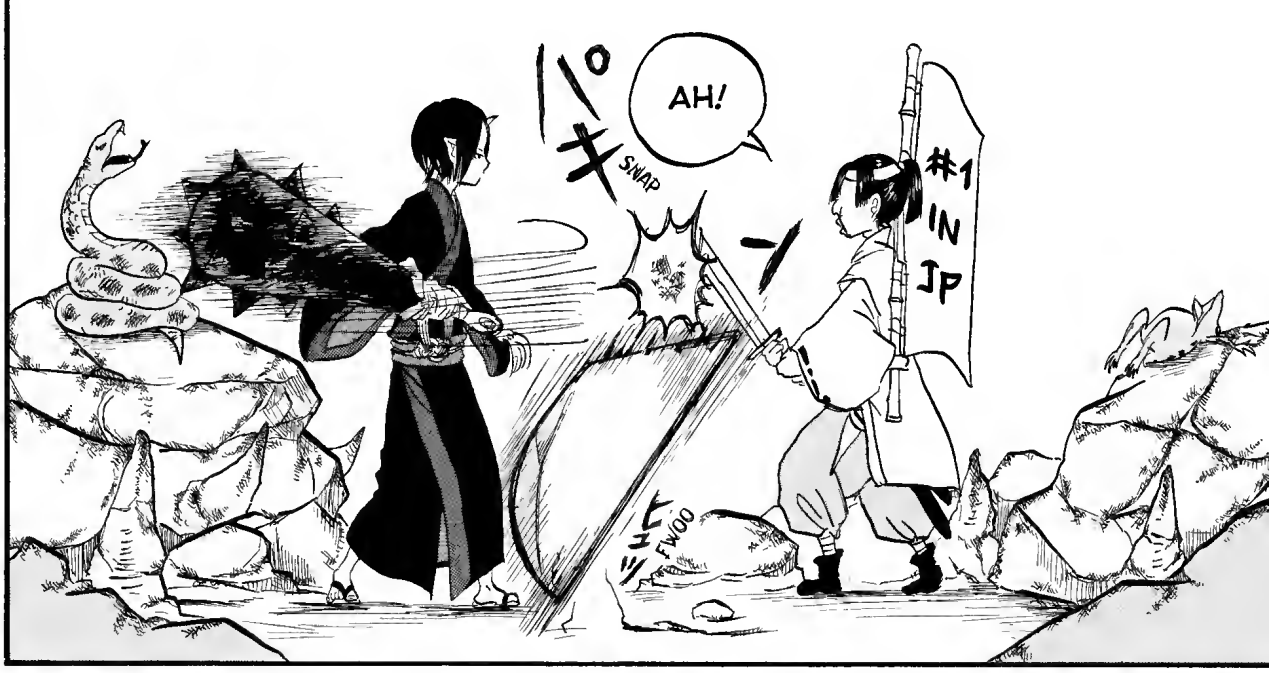
TWITCH
DID YOU EVER APOLOGIZE?
WEREN'T YOU SUED 600 YEARS AGO BY THE CRAB FAMILY ON CHARGES OF VIOLENT BATTERY?
KAKISUKE? AHH...

PHEASANTS SUCK...
THUD
I DON'T THINK MUCH OF YOU.
OTHER THAN THAT YOU'RE A BIGGER BIRD THAN I EXPECTED,
PLEASE... PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR MY PAST SINS...
AND YOU...
HEY! WHAT'S WRONG?!

GRRRRRR
MOMO-TARO... OGRES ARE TOO POWERFUL.
WE'RE BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE...
WHINE
#1 IN JP
WAHHH! MY COM-RADES!

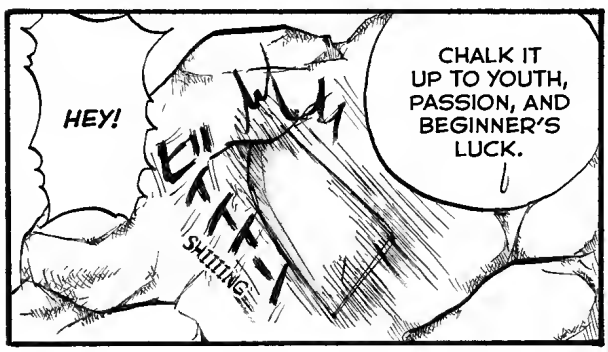
FEEL THE WRATH OF MY SWORD-PLAY!
CLINK
DOES YOUR HEART-LESS-NESS KNOW NO BOUNDS ?!
YOU DAMN OGRE!

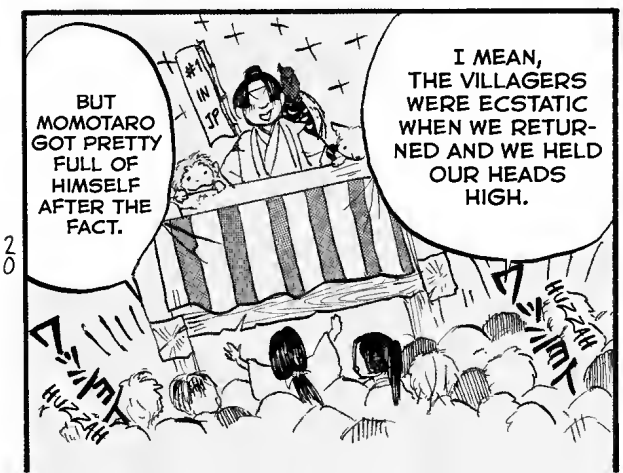
#1 IN JP


AH!
SNAP
#1 IN JP
FWOO

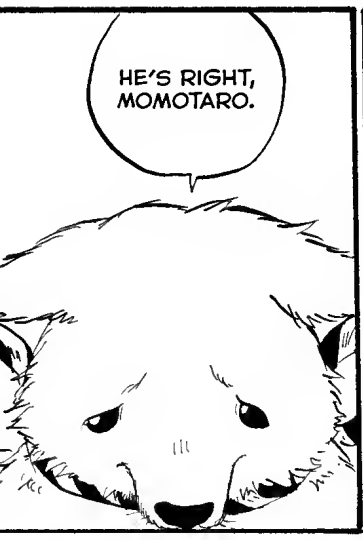
TO BE HONEST, THEY WERE PRETTY HAMMERED WHEN WE JUMPED THEM.
#1 IN JP
HOW DID THESE GUYS CLEAR OUT OGRE ISLAND?
DON'T SPILL THE BEANS!

AHHHHHH!
EVEN A LEGENDARY BLADE WOULD BREAK WHEN HIT WITH A METAL CLUB...
SAW THAT COMING...


HEY!
SKITTING...
CHALK IT UP TO YOUTH, PASSION, AND BEGINNER'S LUCK.

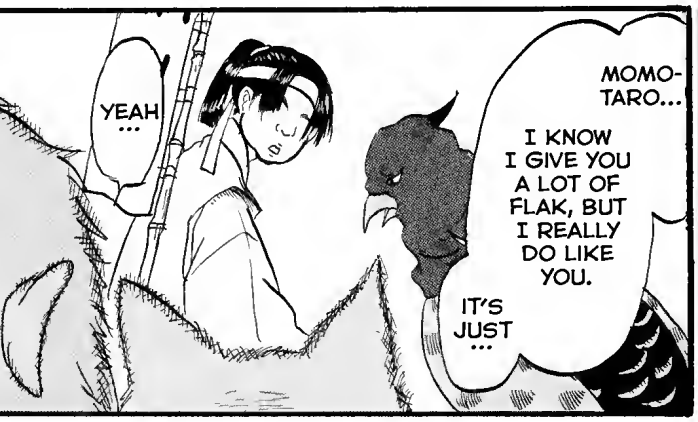

BUT MOMOTARO GOT PRETTY FULL OF HIMSELF AFTER THE FACT.
#1 IN JP
I MEAN, THE VILLAGERS WERE ECSTATIC WHEN WE RETURNED AND WE HELD OUR HEADS HIGH.
HUZZAH
HUZZAH

SLAP


HE'S RIGHT, MOMOTARO.

...

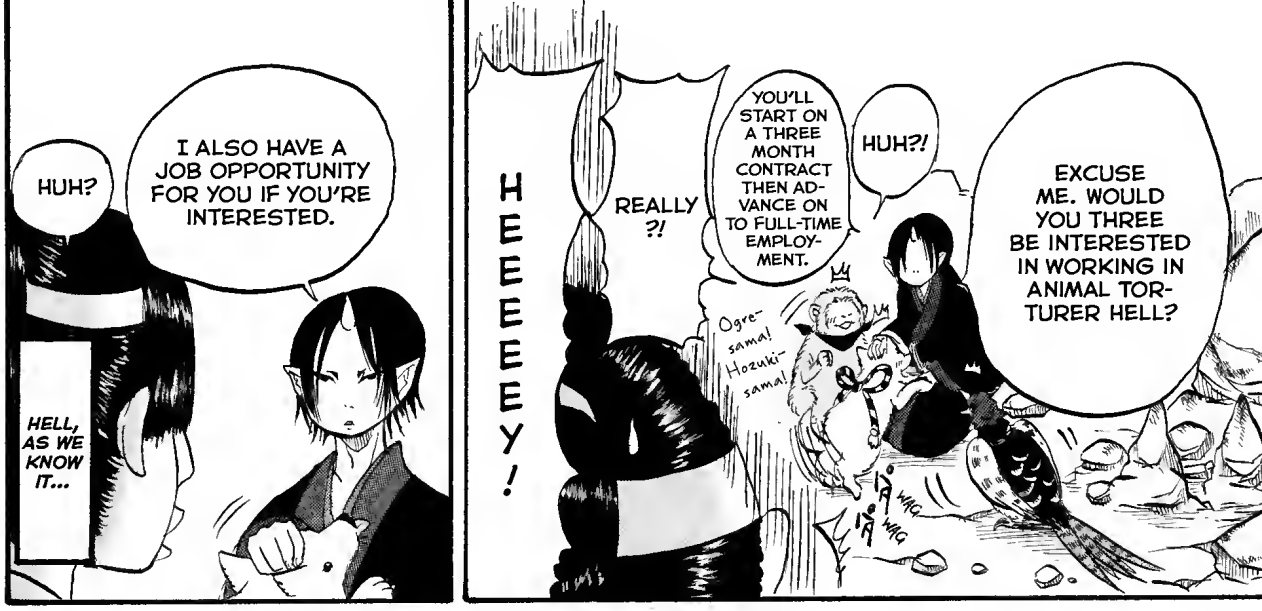
YOU LIVED YOUR LIFE AS A HERO,
YET YOU'RE PULLING STUNTS LIKE THIS IN THE AFTER-LIFE.
HAVE YOU NO SHAME?

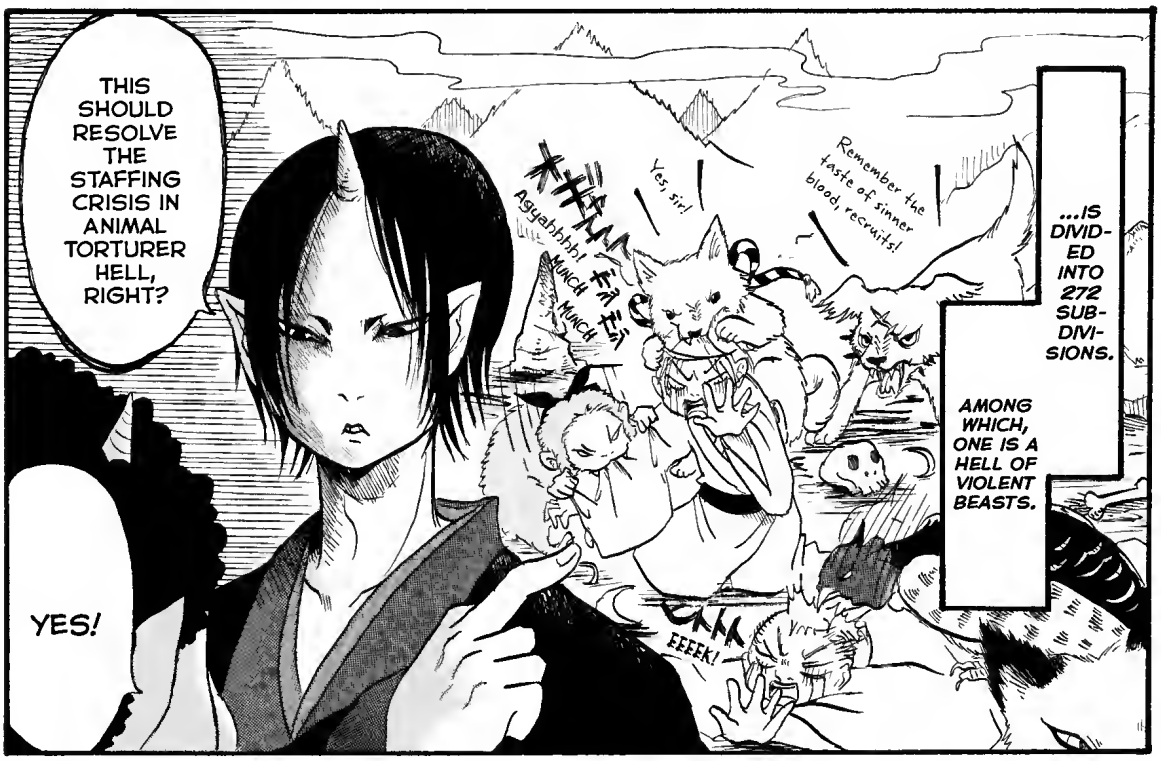

YEAH...
MOMO-TARO...
I KNOW I GIVE YOU A LOT OF FLAK, BUT I REALLY DO LIKE YOU.
IT'S JUST...

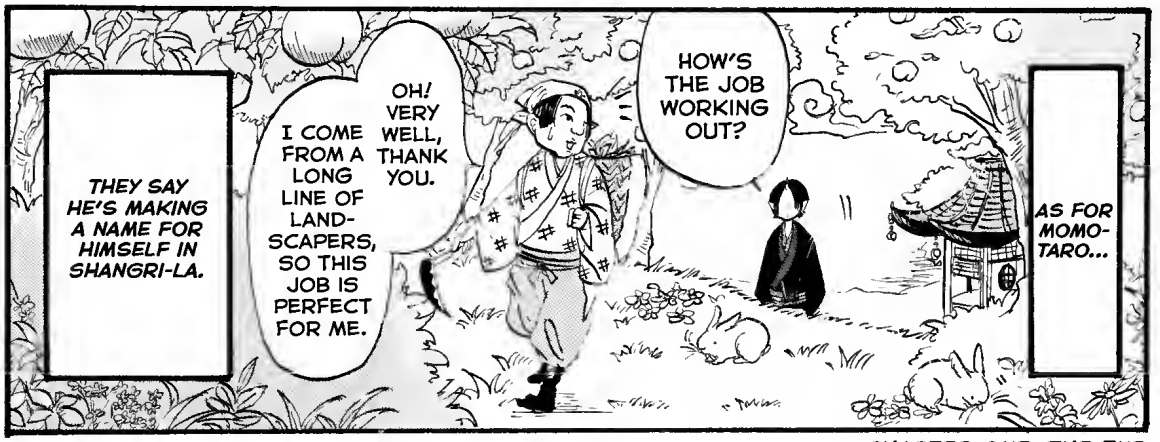
YOU WERE JUST DESPERATE TO PRESERVE YOUR PRIDE, RIGHT?

YOU GUYS...
YOU...

YOU DON'T NEED TO OBSESS OVER OGRES JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE *MOMOTARO.*
YOU CAN'T HOLD ON TO PAST GLORY FOREVER.

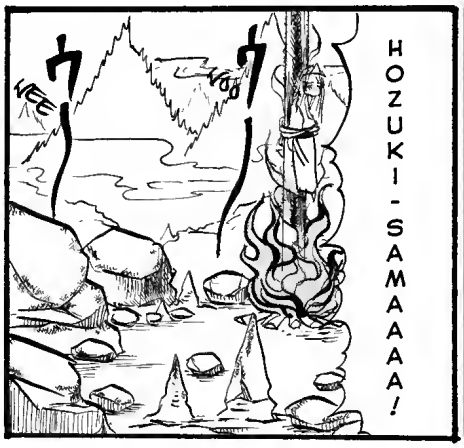

HUH?
I ALSO HAVE A JOB OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU IF YOU'RE INTERESTED.
HELL, AS WE KNOW IT...
HEEEEEY!
REALLY?!
YOU'LL START ON A THREE MONTH CONTRACT THEN ADVANCE ON TO FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT.
HUH?!
EXCUSE ME. WOULD YOU THREE BE INTERESTED IN WORKING IN ANIMAL TORTURER HELL?
Ogre-sama! Hozuki-sama!
WAG WAG

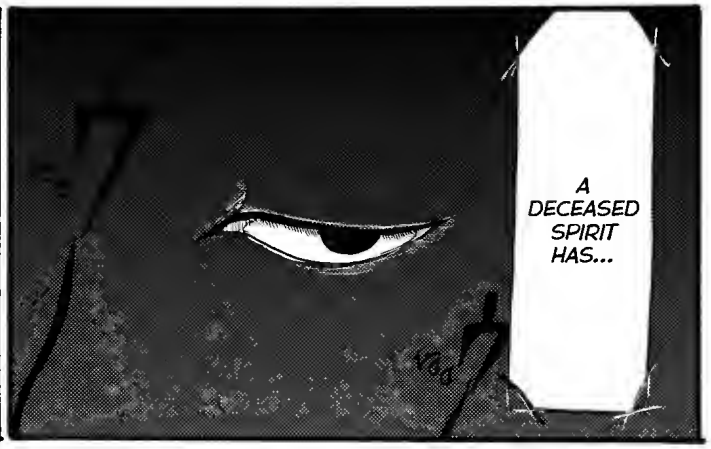

THIS SHOULD RESOLVE THE STAFFING CRISIS IN ANIMAL TORTURER HELL, RIGHT?
YES!
Yes, sir!
Remember the taste of sinner blood, recruits!
Agyahhhh!
MUNCH MUNCH
EEEEK!
...IS DIVIDED INTO 272 SUBDIVISIONS.
AMONG WHICH, ONE IS A HELL OF VIOLENT BEASTS.


THEY SAY HE'S MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF IN SHANGRI-LA.
I COME FROM A LONG LINE OF LANDSCAPERS, SO THIS JOB IS PERFECT FOR ME.
OH! VERY WELL, THANK YOU.
HOW'S THE JOB WORKING OUT?
AS FOR MOMOTARO...

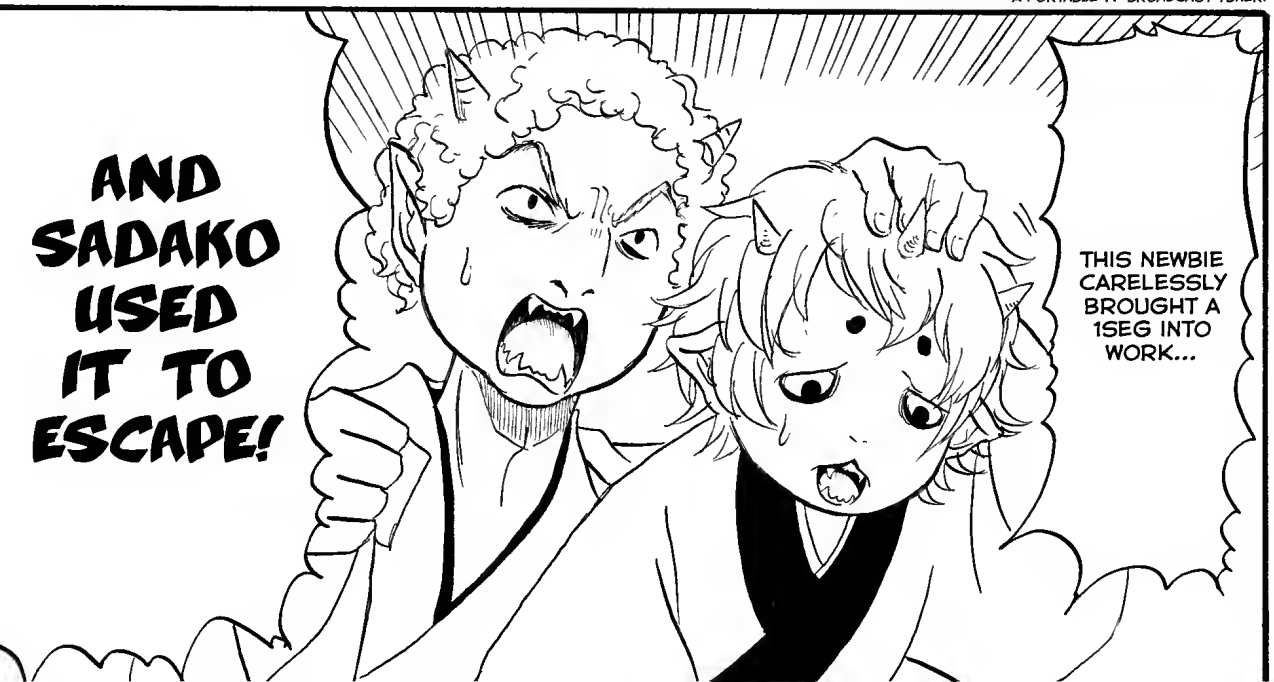
CHAPTER ONE: THE END

A DECEASED SPIRIT HAS ESCAPED FROM REPETITION HELL!
ALL HELL GATES ARE TO BE CLOSED IMMEDIATELY!
I REPEAT,
EMERGENCY! EMERGENCY!



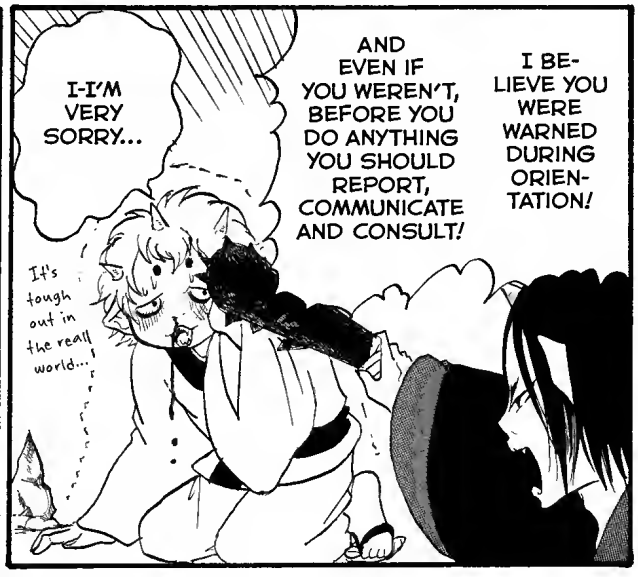

* A PORTABLE TV BROADCAST TUNER.



CHAPTER 2
SHIRO AND DAILY ENDEAVORS

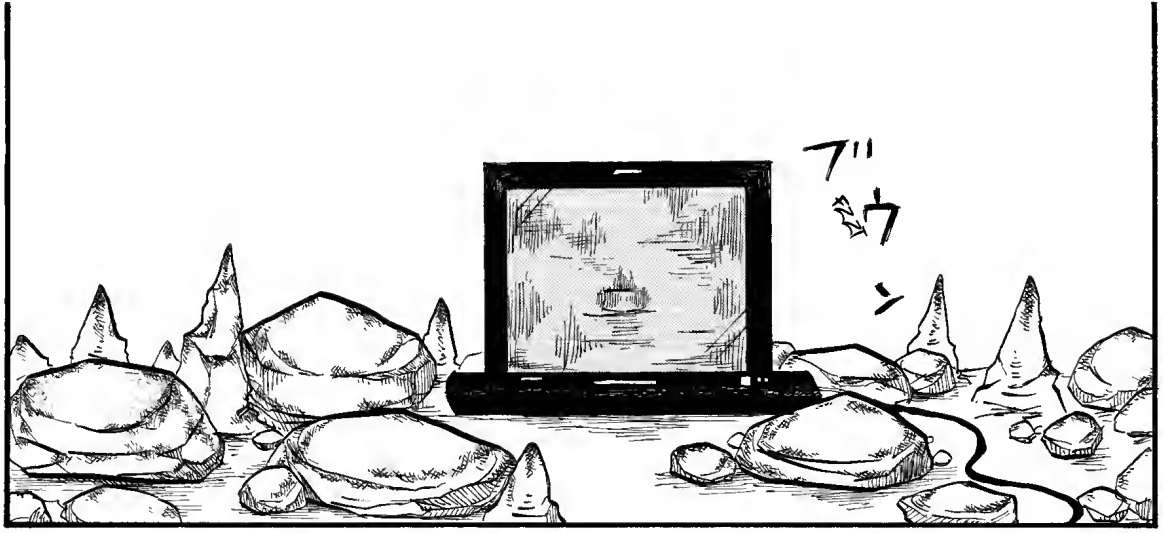
SMACK

IT SOUNDS LIKE SHE REALLY WORKED FOR IT!
YOU SAID SHE ESCAPED THROUGH A 1SEG? TALK ABOUT A GUTSY SPIRIT...
Uwoohhh! It's crammmmped!
RATTLE RATTLE RATTLE


I-I'M VERY SORRY...
AND EVEN IF YOU WEREN'T, BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING YOU SHOULD REPORT, COMMUNICATE AND CONSULT!
I BELIEVE YOU WERE WARNED DURING ORIENTATION!
It's tough out in the real world...

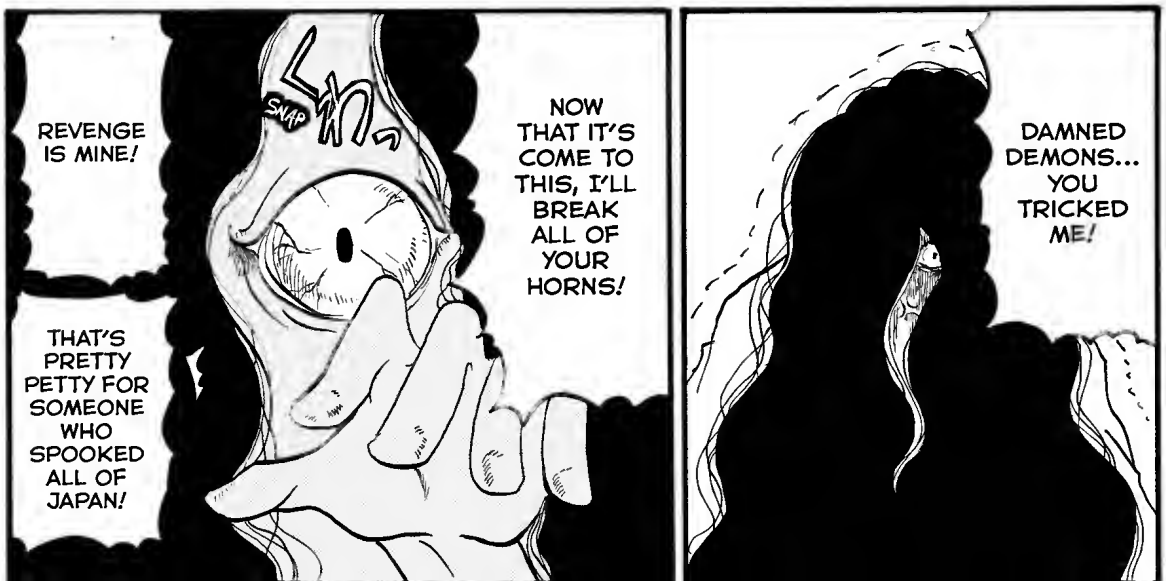
THEN INSTALL A 52-INCH WITH A BUILT IN BLU-RAY RIGHT HERE!
AFFIX SEALS TO ALL TVS IN THE AREA!
HUH?!
?

SADAKO...
SHE CAN GET AWAY AS LONG AS SHE HAS A TV TO USE.
...



SEE? LIKE SHOOTING FISH IN A BARREL.
...Huh?
Here she comes.
Woohhhh! This resolution is insane!
ZWOOHHH
JUST LIKE THE TALE OF THE YAMATO-NO-OROCHI...
Aim for the eyes!
I guess you can't beat a good TV...

* AN EIGHT-HEADED SERPENT OF LEGEND TEMPTED WITH SAKE.

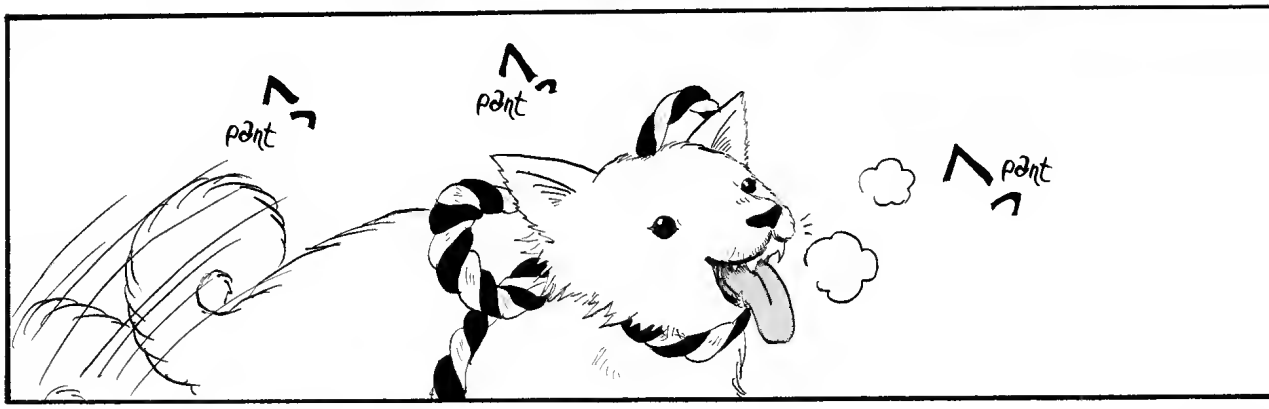

REVENGE IS MINE!
SNAP
NOW THAT IT'S COME TO THIS, I'LL BREAK ALL OF YOUR HORNS!
THAT'S PRETTY PETTY FOR SOMEONE WHO SPOOKED ALL OF JAPAN!
DAMNED DEMONS... YOU TRICKED ME!

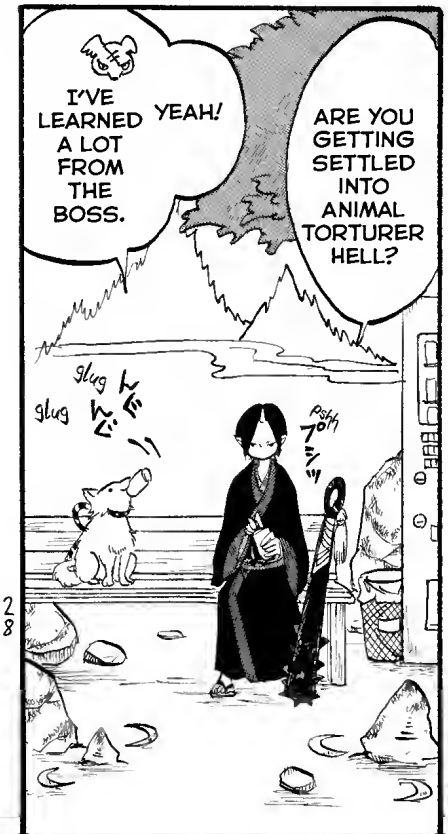
AHH!
LOOK OUT, HOZUKI-SAMA!
GWON
Shut up! A woman's wrath is a thousand times that of a snake! Prepare yourself!

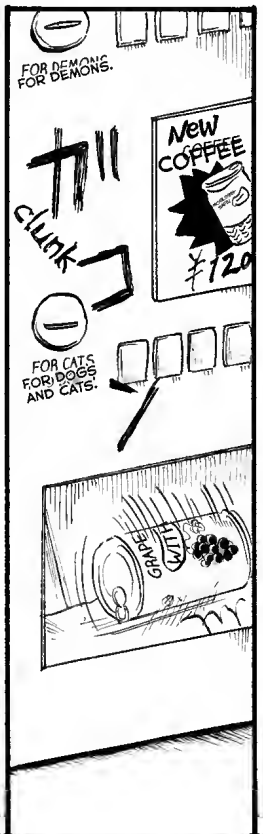
BLRRGH!
WHACK
GWON

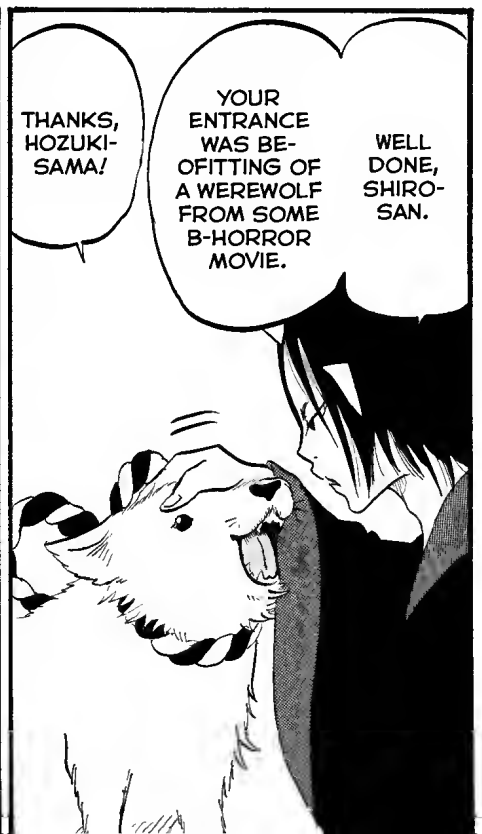
pant
pant
pant

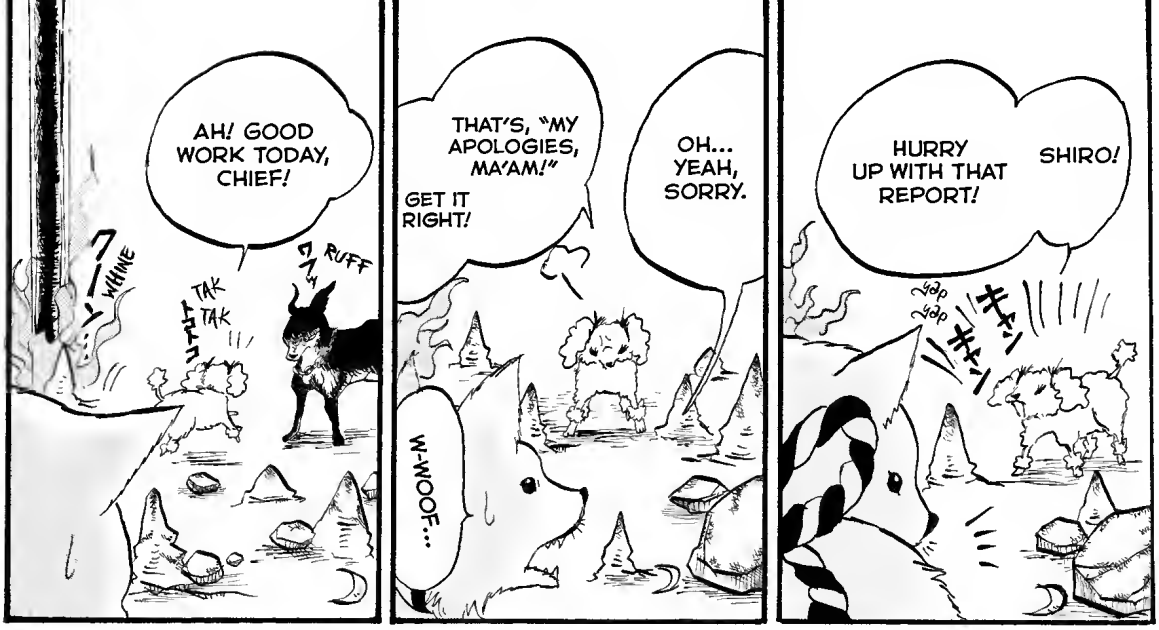
GYAHHH!
IT'S SUPER SCARY!
WHAT'S WITH THIS DOG?!
rustle
rustle
rustle
rustle
rustle
rustle
rustle
rustle

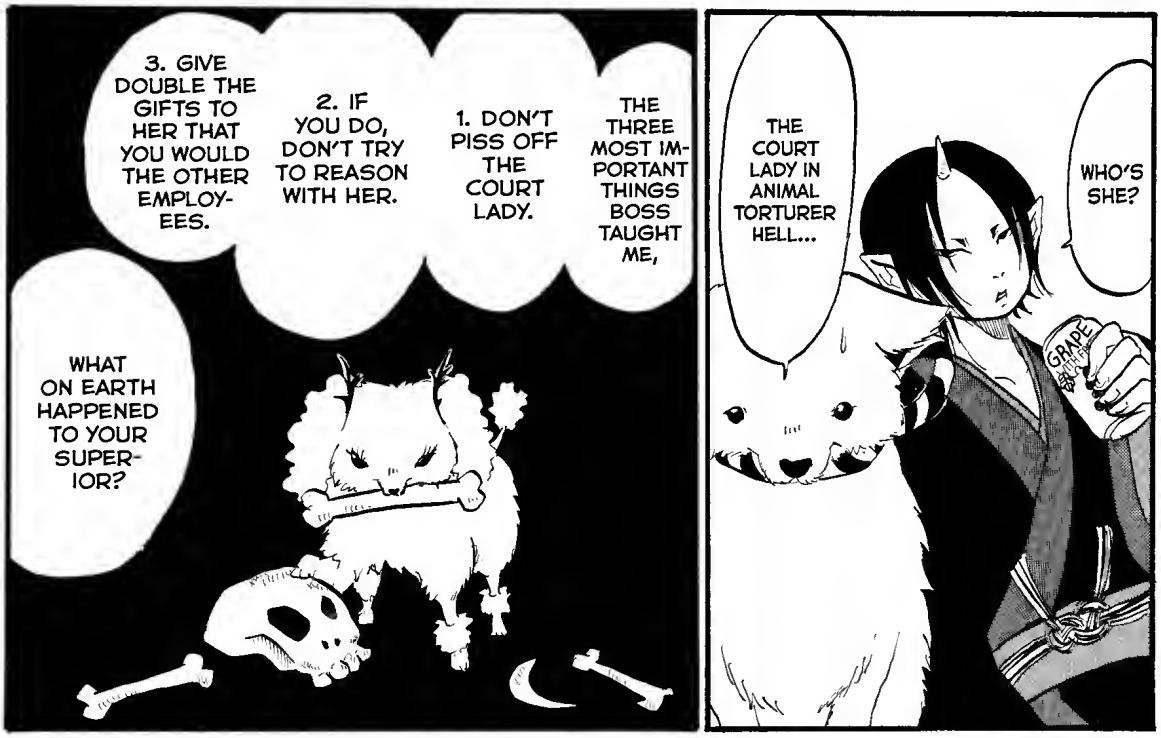

pant
pant
pant


I'VE LEARNED A LOT FROM THE BOSS.
YEAH!
ARE YOU GETTING SETTLED INTO ANIMAL TORTURER HELL?
glug
glug
pshh

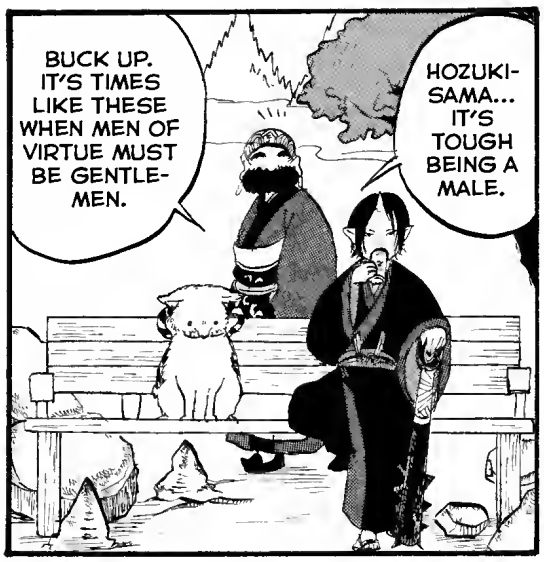

FOR DEMONS FOR DEMONS.
NEW COFFEE
¥120
clunk
FOR CATS FOR DOGS AND CATS.
GRAPE WITH


THANKS, HOZUKI-SAMA!
YOUR ENTRANCE WAS BE-OFITTING OF A WEREWOLF FROM SOME B-HORROR MOVIE.
WELL DONE, SHIRO-SAN.

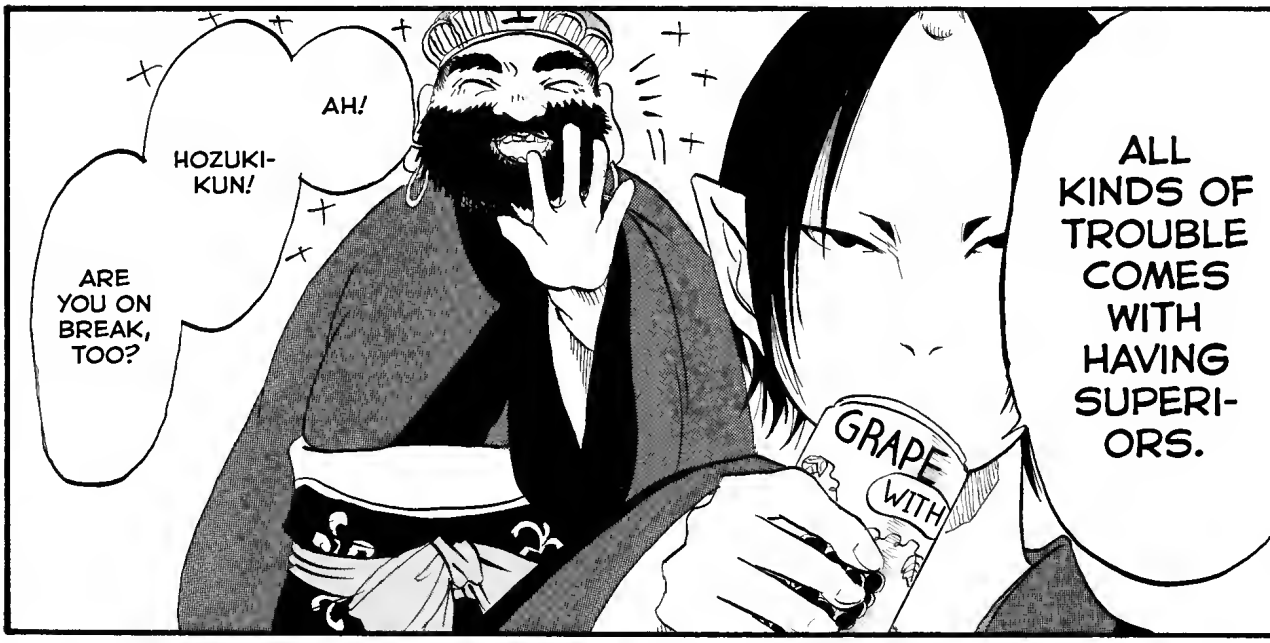

AH! GOOD WORK TODAY, CHIEF!
WHINE
TAK TAK
RUFF
THAT'S, "MY APOLOGIES, MA'AM!"
GET IT RIGHT!
OH... YEAH, SORRY.
W-WOOF...
HURRY UP WITH THAT REPORT!
SHIRO!
yap yap
キャン キャン


3. GIVE DOUBLE THE GIFTS TO HER THAT YOU WOULD THE OTHER EMPLOY-EES.
2. IF YOU DO, DON'T TRY TO REASON WITH HER.
1. DON'T PISS OFF THE COURT LADY.
THE THREE MOST IM-PORTANT THINGS BOSS TAUGHT ME,
WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED TO YOUR SUPER-IOR?
THE COURT LADY IN ANIMAL TORTURER HELL...
WHO'S SHE?
GRAPE

BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE THE OFFICE HAS QUITE A LOVE TRIANGLE GOING ON.
I DON'T CARE THAT MUCH,
Beefy Section Chief
BUT HER VOICE GOES UP AN OCTAVE WHEN SHE TALKS TO THE SECTION CHIEF.
THE COURT LADY'S UNUSUALLY STRICT WITH SEMPAI,


HOZUKI-SAMA... IT'S TOUGH BEING A MALE.
BUCK UP. IT'S TIMES LIKE THESE WHEN MEN OF VIRTUE MUST BE GENTLE-MEN.

I CATCH HER BROWS-ING ZEXY SOME-TIMES.
HAH! LIKE HELL ANYONE WOULD PUT A RING ON THAT...
sigh
NOW, NOW.
THAT'S JUST YOUR OPINION.
FOR STARTERS, ARE YOU SURE SHE'S INTO THE CHIEF?


ALL KINDS OF TROUBLE COMES WITH HAVING SUPERI-ORS.
GRAPE
WITH
AH!
HOZUKI-KUN!
ARE YOU ON BREAK, TOO?

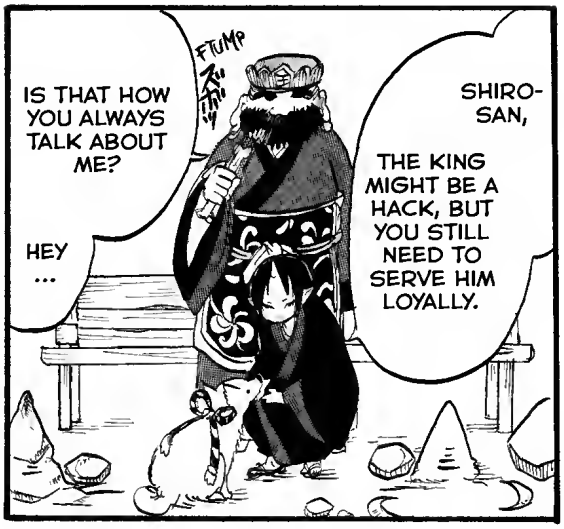
AH!
ARE YOU THE NEWCOMER, SHIRO?
WOOF!
3 pant pant

OH?
DRINKING JUICE, I SEE.
WHAT'S THIS? ARE YOU GOSSIP-ING ABOUT SOMEONE?
...

* ANTONIO INOKI, A JAPANESE WRESTLER, POLITICIAN AND TALENT WHOSE SIGNATURE MOVE IS A SLAP.

WHACK
SHIRO-SAN, THIS IS THE KING OF HELL, LORD ENMA.
NICE TO MEET YOU. I'M ENMA.
AND HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE MY CONFIDANT.
H-HOW DO YOU DO?
NOT GREAT AT THE MOMENT.
NOD

I AM THE KING, RIGHT?
SHUT UP.
HOZUKI-KUN.
HEEEY.
IF YOU SERVE HIM WELL, YOU'LL SURELY BE REWARD-ED.
glance
glance


IS THAT HOW YOU ALWAYS TALK ABOUT ME?
HEY ...
FTUMP
SHIRO-SAN,
THE KING MIGHT BE A HACK, BUT YOU STILL NEED TO SERVE HIM LOYALLY.

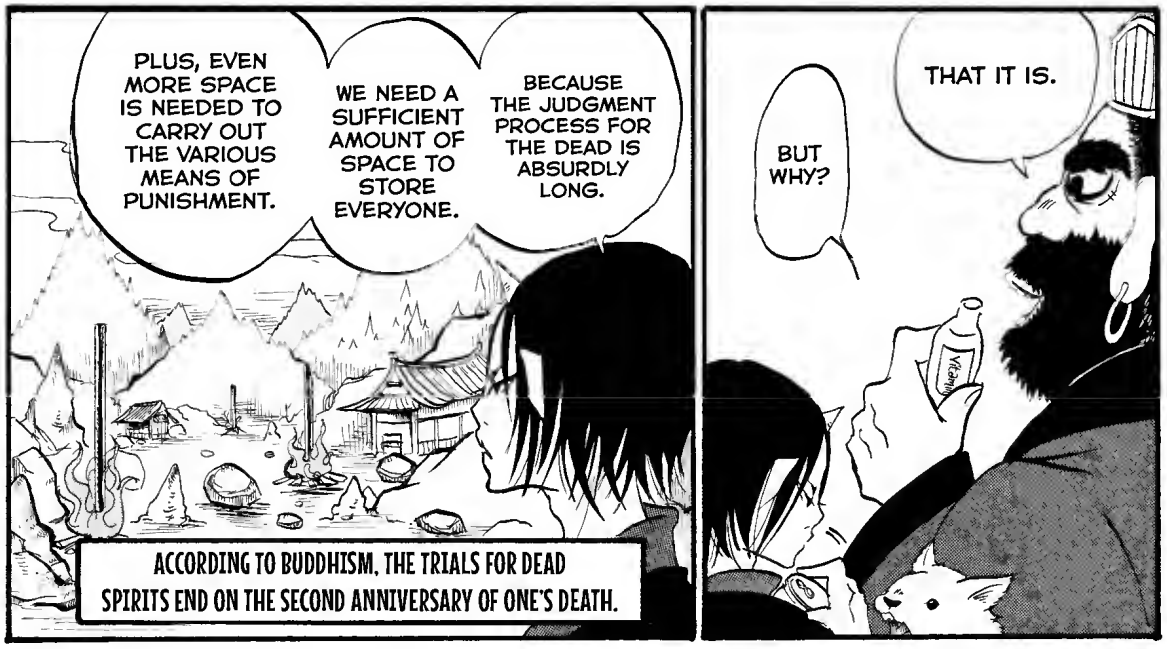
HUH?!
I'M AT YOUR SERVICE, ENMA-SAN!
Hozuki-sama
Enma-san
Sempai
Momotaro
Me
Lurio
Kakisuke
1
2
3
4
4
4
4
YES, HOZUKI-SAMA! I'LL SERVE HIM TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY!
snap
CANINES HAVE AN INNATE ABILITY TO SENSE POWER BALANCES AND DETERMINE WHO IS THE BOSS, REFLECTED IN THEIR BEHAVIOR.

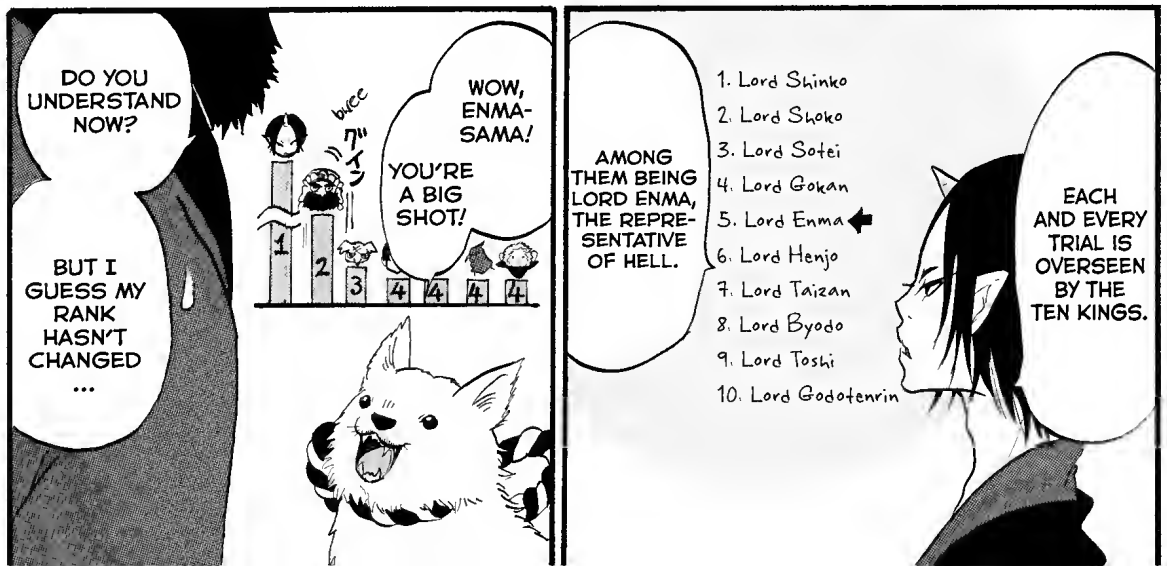
I WAS SURPRISED WHEN I FIRST GOT HERE.
I WAS IN HEAVEN WITH MOMO-TARO UNTIL NOW.
HELL SURE IS BIG, ISN'T IT?
Grump
HEY, ENMA-SAN, HOZUKI-SAMA.
UM... COULD YOU AT LEAST CALL ME SAMA, TOO?
SURE THING, EN-SAMA.
Gyahhh
INDEED IT IS.
THE AFTERLIFE CONTAINS BOTH HEAVEN AND HELL...
...BUT HELL IS OVERWHELMINGLY LARGER THAN HEAVEN.
EN-SAMA? KINDA LIKE YON-SAMA, HUH? I LIKE IT...
GRAPE
WITH

* BAE YOONG-JOON, A POPULAR SOUTH KOREAN ACTOR AND BUSINESSMAN.

BOUNDARY BETWEEN JAPAN & CHINA
AMATERASU
REALM OF THE GODS
PURE LAND
ORIGINALLY JAPAN WAS SPLIT INTO JUST TWO REALMS: LIFE AND THE AFTERLIFE.
HOWEVER, EONS AGO,
THE AFTERLIFE KNOWN AS YOMI AT THE TIME WAS PLUNGED INTO CHAOS DUE TO THE INCREASING NUMBER OF DEAD.
SO THE DEITIES CONGREGATED TO FORMULATE A PLAN OF ACTION.
FUJI
NAGOYA CASTLE
IKEBUKURO
GOKOKU-JI
TOKYO TOWER
SHANGRI-LA
AS SUCH,
THE REALMS WERE SPLIT INTO THREE, LIFE, HEAVEN AND HELL, WHICH STILL HOLDS TO THIS DAY.
AH! IT'S IKEBUKURO STATION!
THAT PLACE HAS SO MANY EXITS IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN AN FF DUNGEON.
REPETITION HELL
BLACK ROPE HELL
CRUSHING HELL
SCREAMING HELL
INTERMINABLE HELL
GREAT SCREAMING HELL
SCORCHING HELL
GREAT SCORCHING HELL
YES, YES. AS I WAS SAYING...
THE CONSTRUCTION OF HELL WAS DECIDED BY BORROWING IDEAS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES SUCH AS INDIA AND CHINA.
AS SUCH, JAPAN'S AFTERLIFE IS NOW QUITE COMPLICATED.
MUCH LIKE IKEBUKURO STATION.
WELL, WHEN YOU COMPARE HEAVEN AND HELL...

PAT
HELL IS QUITE LARGE.


PLUS, EVEN MORE SPACE IS NEEDED TO CARRY OUT THE VARIOUS MEANS OF PUNISHMENT.
WE NEED A SUFFICIENT AMOUNT OF SPACE TO STORE EVERYONE.
BECAUSE THE JUDGMENT PROCESS FOR THE DEAD IS ABSURDLY LONG.
ACCORDING TO BUDDHISM, THE TRIALS FOR DEAD SPIRITS END ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF ONE'S DEATH.
BUT WHY?
THAT IT IS.

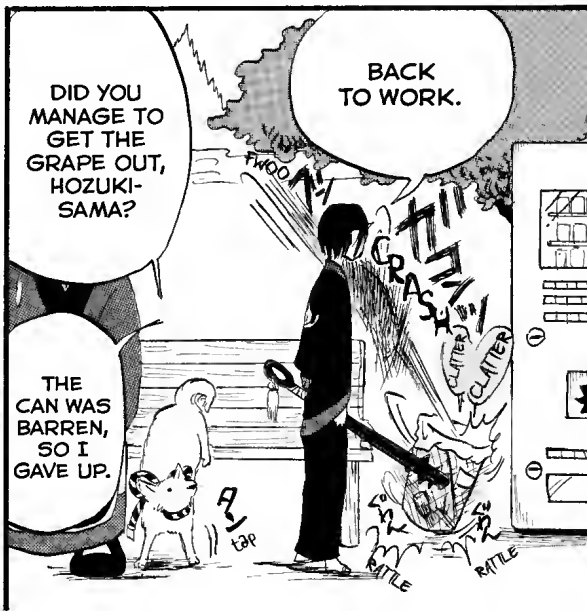

DO YOU UNDERSTAND NOW?
BUT I GUESS MY RANK HASN'T CHANGED ...
WOW, ENMA-SAMA! YOU'RE A BIG SHOT!
1
2
3
4
4
4
4
AMONG THEM BEING LORD ENMA, THE REPRESENTATIVE OF HELL.
1. Lord Shinko
2. Lord Shoko
3. Lord Sotei
4. Lord Gokan
5. Lord Enma
6. Lord Henjo
7. Lord Taizan
8. Lord Byodo
9. Lord Toshi
10. Lord Godotenrin
EACH AND EVERY TRIAL IS OVERSEEN BY THE TEN KINGS.

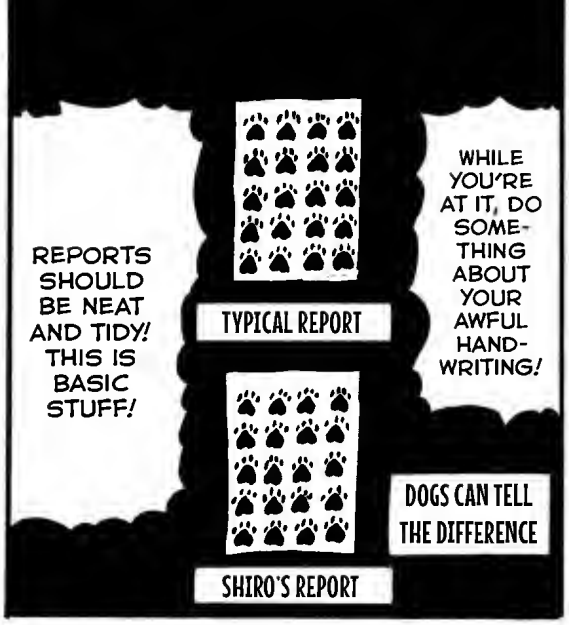
AND SHOULD YOU REALLY BE SLACKING OFF, LORD ENMA?
OH, YEAH...
CAN YOU BLAME ME? I'M BEAT.
I'VE BEEN AT THIS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS NOW.

I'M SURE YOU MUST BE BUSY, SHIRO-SAN.
WELL, THEN. LET'S GET BACK TO WORK, SHALL WE?
pat ポン ポン pat

WOWIE. THAT'S AN AWFULLY PLAYFUL POSE FOR A GROWN-UP.
tap コソ
THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR ME TO BE GOOFING OFF, EITHER.

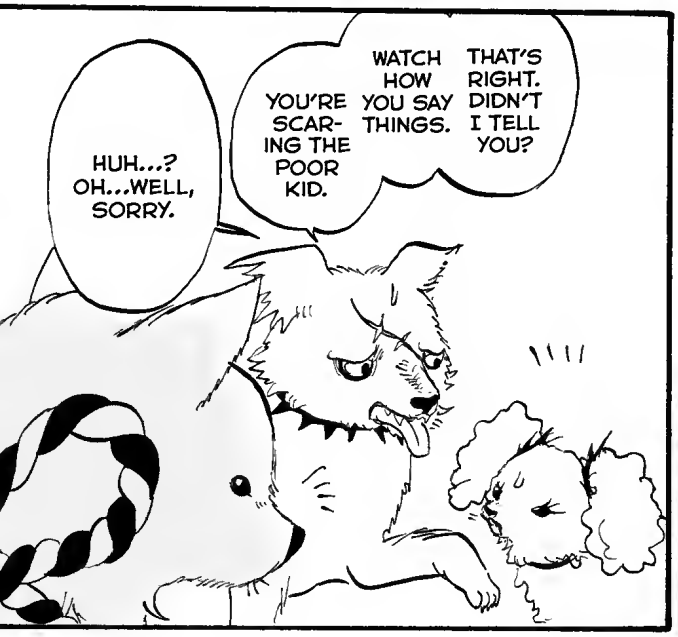
SHIRO!


BACK TO WORK.
DID YOU MANAGE TO GET THE GRAPE OUT, HOZUKI-SAMA?
THE CAN WAS BARREN, SO I GAVE UP.
CRASH
CLATTER
CLATTER
RATTLE
RATTLE
tap

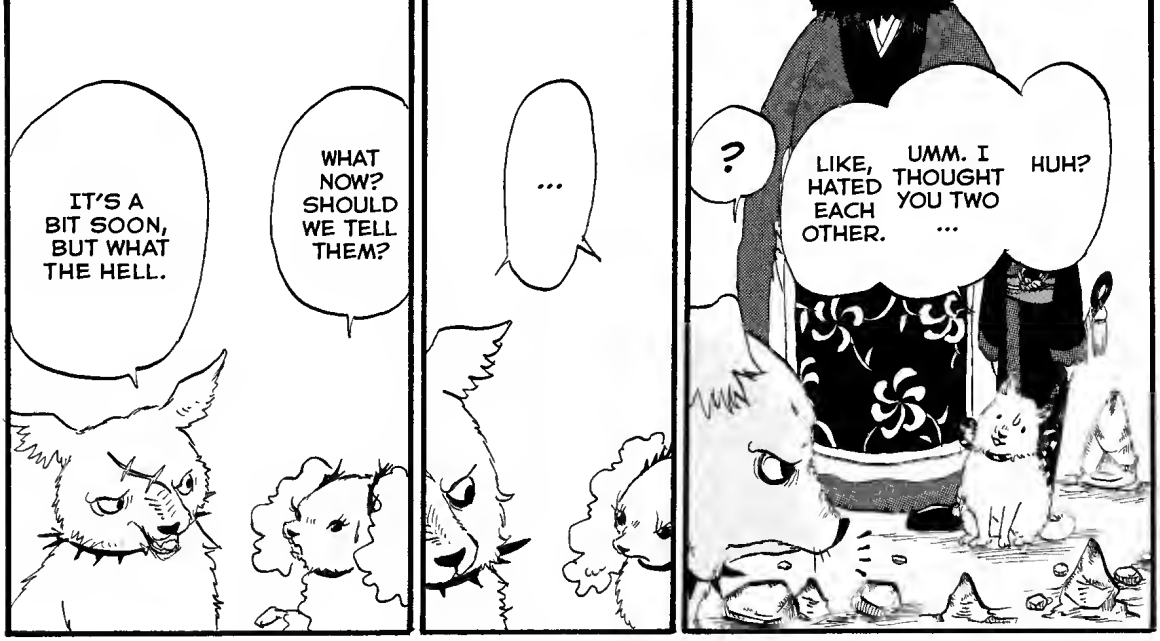

REPORTS SHOULD BE NEAT AND TIDY! THIS IS BASIC STUFF!
TYPICAL REPORT
WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, DO SOME-THING ABOUT YOUR AWFUL HAND-WRITING!
DOGS CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE
SHIRO'S REPORT

ARE YOU STILL NOT DONE WITH THE REPORT?! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO ASK YOU?!
yap yap yap
AH... I'M SORRY.

SEE? ISN'T THE COURT LADY HARSH?
THIS IS WHAT MAKES ME THINK SHE'LL NEVER GET MARRIED.
I BELIEVE PEOPLE SHOULD SPEAK THEIR MIND WHEREVER!
TAP TAP TAP
Now, now...
WHOA, WHOA ...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE A FUSS IN FRONT OF LORD ENMA.


HUH...? OH...WELL, SORRY.
YOU'RE SCAR-ING THE POOR KID.
WATCH HOW YOU SAY THINGS.
THAT'S RIGHT. DIDN'T I TELL YOU?

SHIRO-SAN,
HER PHRASING MIGHT BE HARSH, BUT WHAT SHE SAYS IS TRUE.



I'M GOING TO RETIRE AND BE A HOUSEWIFE.
WE'RE GETTING MARRIED.
...
AN ADULT MALE HAS TO KNOW WHEN A GIRL IS BEING A TSUNDERE.
YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF GROWING UP TO DO, SHIRO.

* SOMEONE WHO IS MOSTLY STANDOFFISH, BUT OCCASIONALLY WARM.

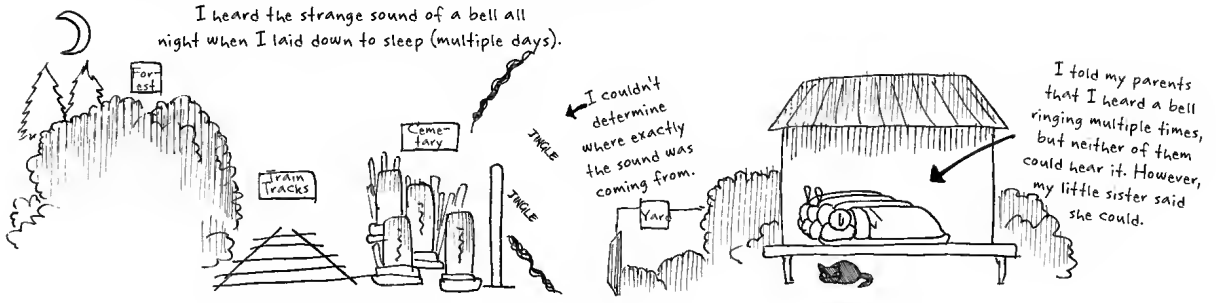
THIS IS HOW DAY-TO-DAY USUALLY IS IN HELL.
Yay!! I look forward to meeting the pups!
LOOKS LIKE ANIMAL TORTURER HELL'S GOING TO BE UNDER-STAFFED AGAIN...
ぱち clap
ぱち clap
ぱち clap
ぱち clap
SERIOUSLY?!
GYAOOOOOHHH!

CHAPTER 2 - END

"A not so scary, but intriguing tale."

Though I'm writing a story about spirits and hell, I don't have spiritual powers or anything. Rather, spirits scare the bajeezus out of me, so I hope to never encounter them in my lifetime. However I have had a few peculiar experiences in my years.

1. At a certain countryside home during grade school...

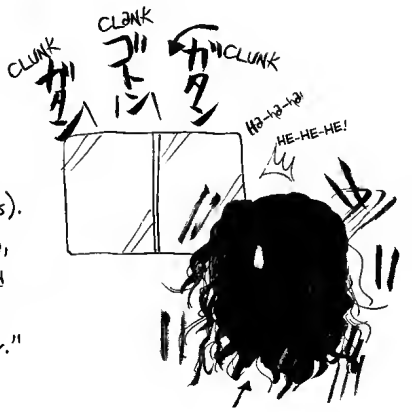

I heard the strange sound of a bell all night when I laid down to sleep (multiple days).
Forest
Train Tracks
Cemetary
TINKLE
TINKLE
I couldn't determine where exactly the sound was coming from.
Yard
I told my parents that I heard a bell ringing multiple times, but neither of them could hear it. However, my little sister said she could.

I wonder what that was...

2. During high school, at a certain prep school...

There were train tracks just outside the window. Whenever a train passed by I could hear the sound of children mixed in with the train noises (multiple occasions). This time around half the class could hear what I heard, while the other half didn't. It turns out there was an old myth in the prep school which foretold that "whomever hears the voices will pass their entrance exams that year." In actuality, a creepy number of people who said they heard the voices passed their exams, including myself.

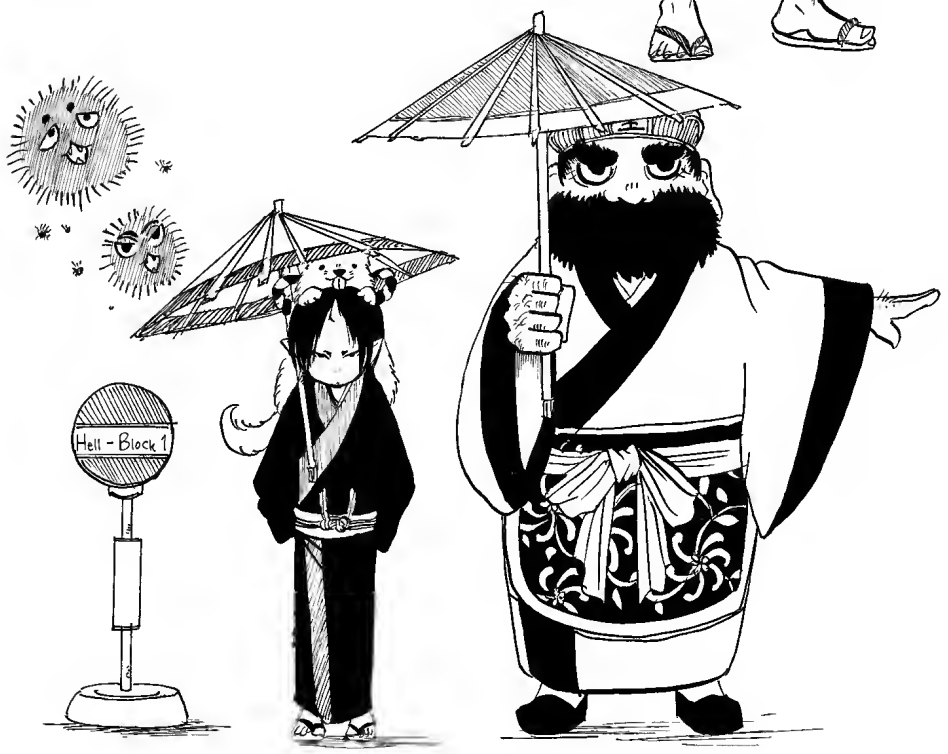
There are many more tales where those came from, but I'll save them for another time.

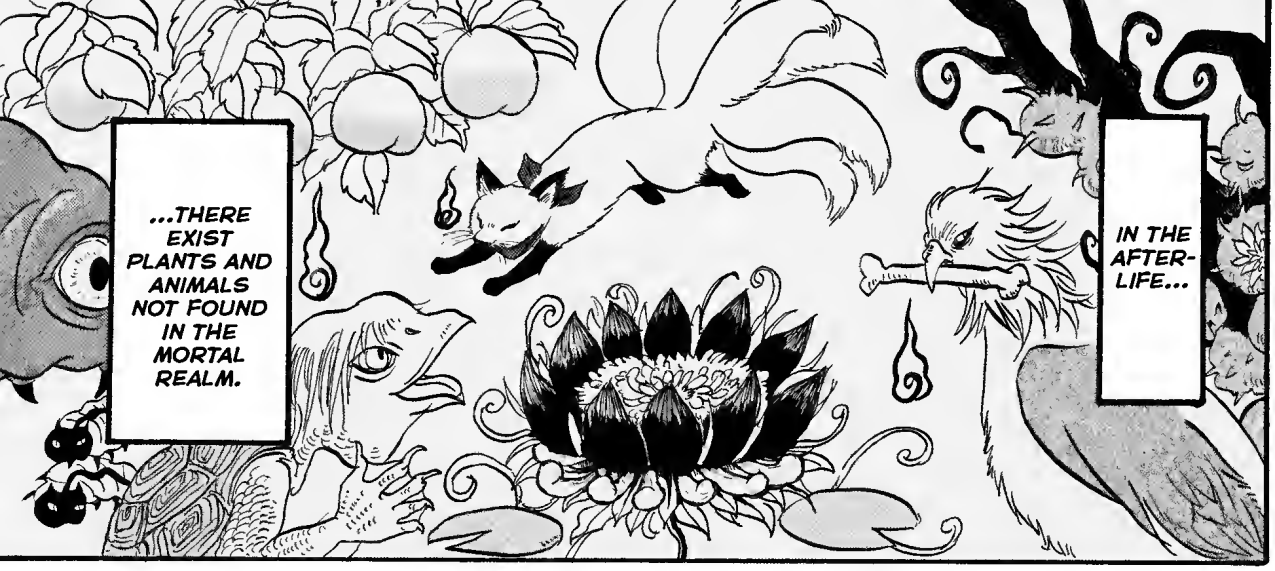


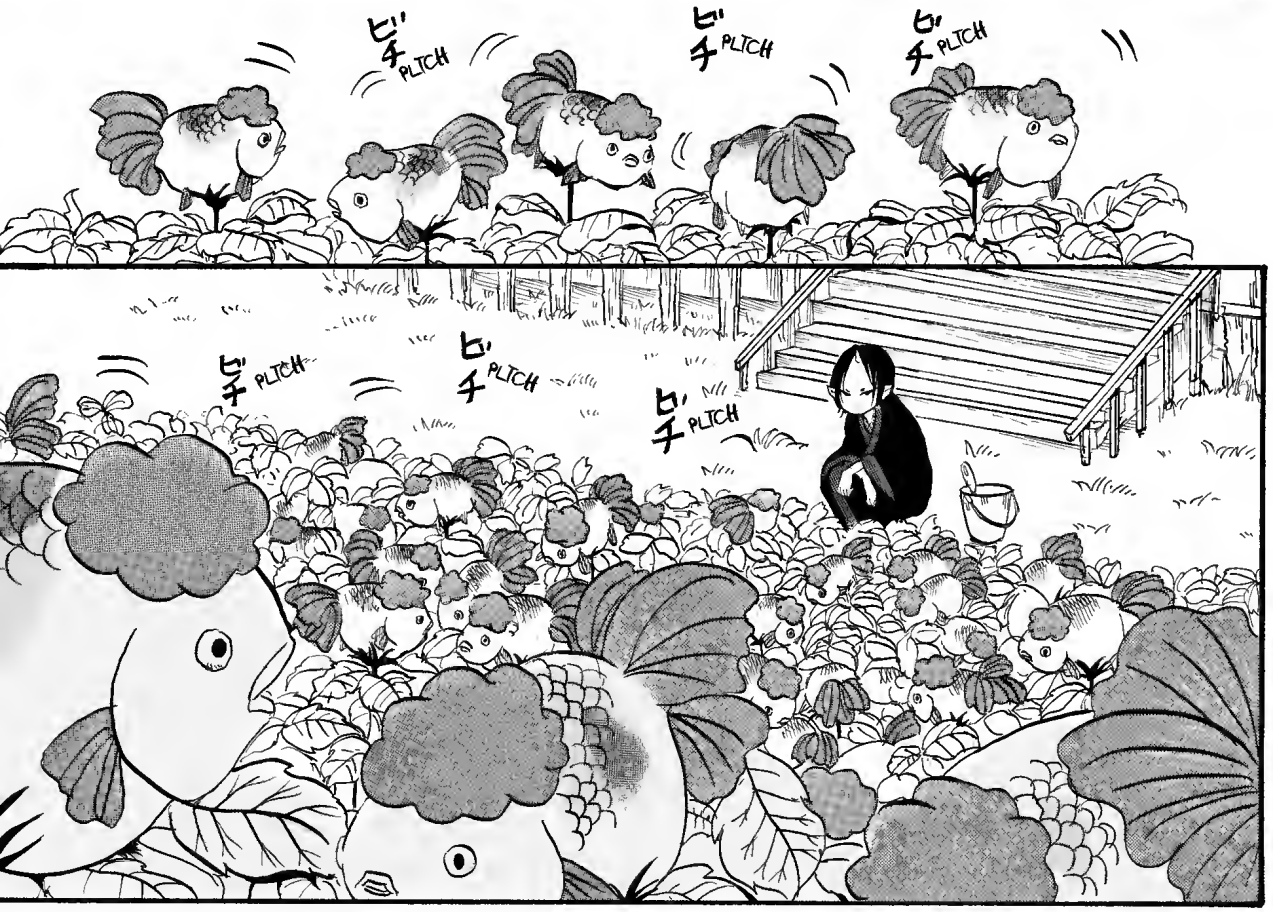

Natural perm. So crazy that when I saw my own reflection in the mirror one night, I seriously thought I saw a ghost.

Hozuki

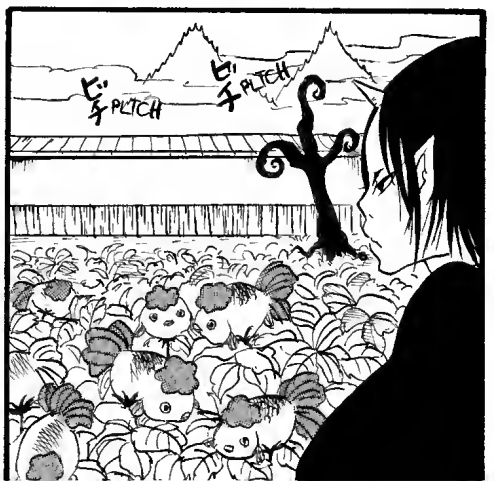
Hozuki seems short next to the giant Lord Enma, but he's actually supposed to be about 6'1". Likewise, I meant him to seem relatively brawny, but when placed next to Enma he seems more like Satsuki standing next to Totoro. I wanted to draw Hozuki here in a way that would better show his build.




...THERE EXIST PLANTS AND ANIMALS NOT FOUND IN THE MORTAL REALM.
IN THE AFTER-LIFE...

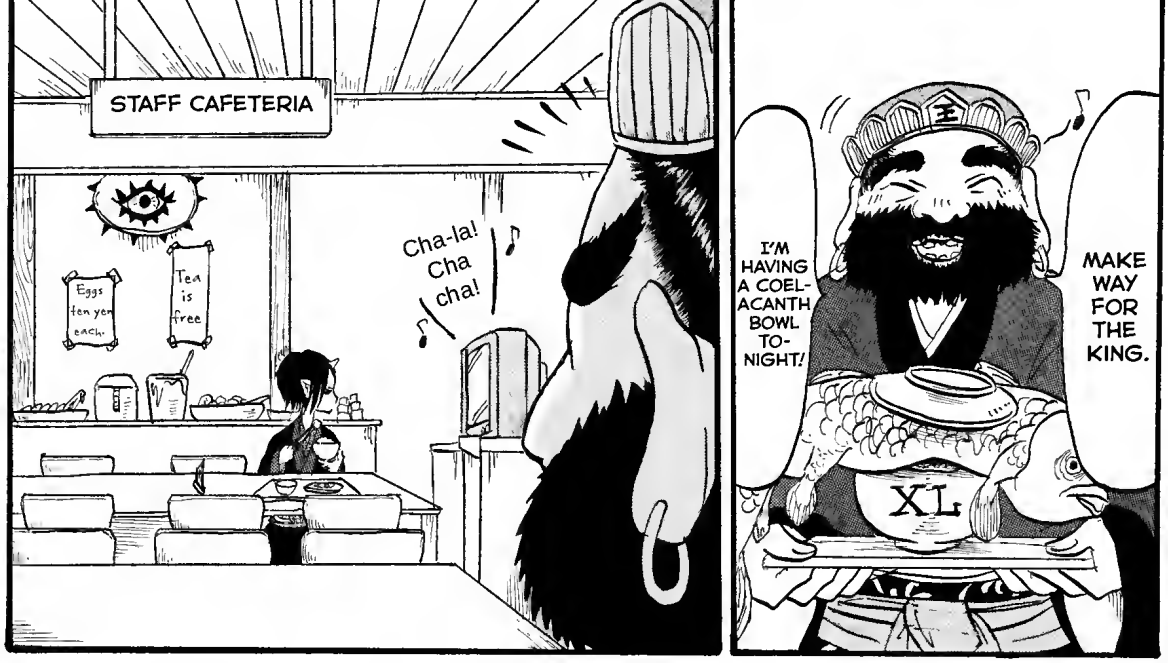

ピチ PLITCH
ピチ PLITCH
ピチ PLITCH
ピチ PLITCH
ピチ PLITCH
ピチ PLITCH

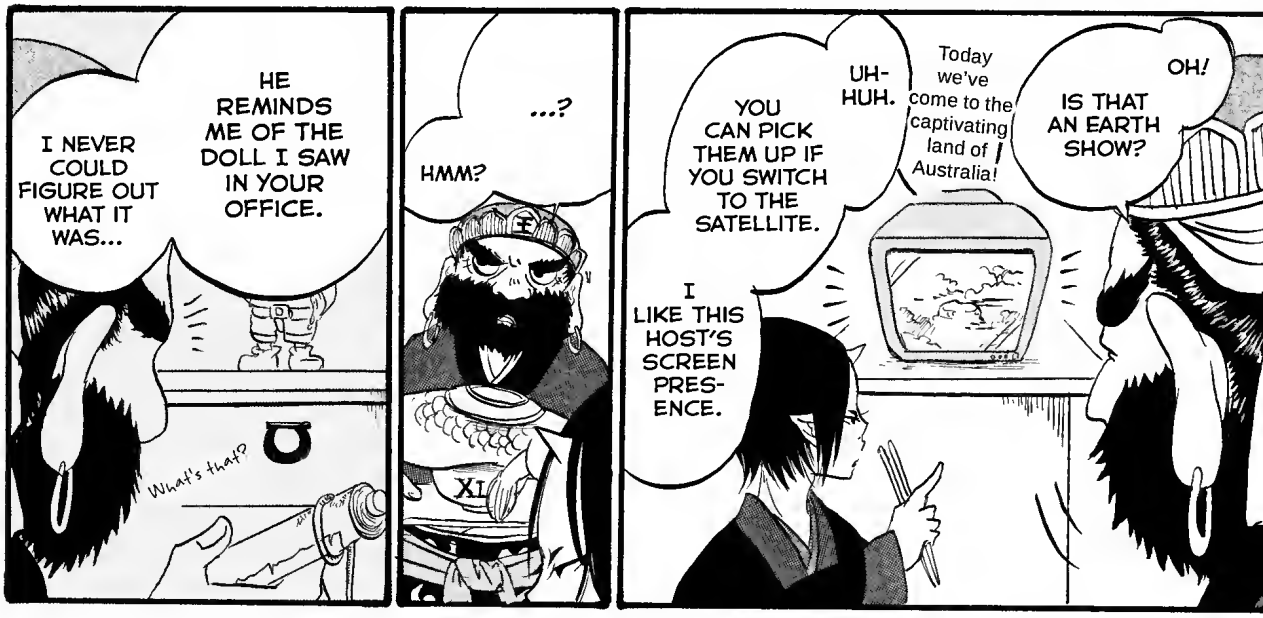
OR DO I CHANGE THE FEED?
THAT IS THE QUES-TION.
NOW, DO I CHANGE THE FER-TILIZER?


ピチ PLITCH
ピチ PLITCH

# CHAPTER 3
# DISCOVERY OF HELL'S MYSTERIES

PLITCH
PLITCH
PLITCH
FSSHH
MY COUSIN CAUGHT HELL FROM HIS WIFE BECAUSE HE WAS SPENDING SO MUCH TIME IN THE GARDEN.
THERE'S EVEN GROWER'S COMPETI-TIONS, RIGHT?
THERE ARE SO MANY GARDENING ENTHUSIASTS THESE DAYS.
FSSHH
BEW
THEY'RE ALL GOLDFISH PLANTS YOU BRED YOURSELF, RIGHT, HOZUKI-SAMA?
THAT'S QUITE A CROP YOU HAVE GOING.
WHOA!
FSSHH
FSSHH
SO I END UP DROWNING MYSELF IN MY HOBBIES.
I HAVE NO TIME TO PLAN A PROPER VACATION.

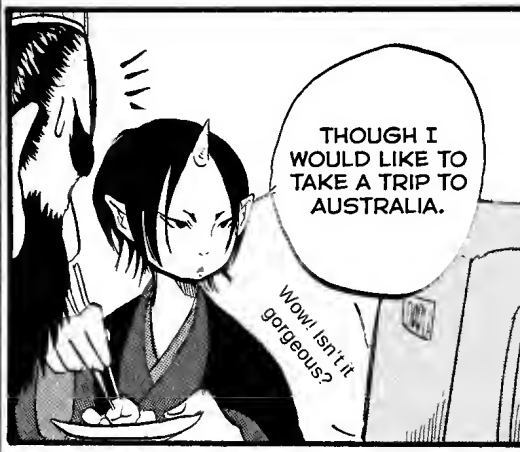




I NEVER COULD FIGURE OUT WHAT IT WAS...
HE REMINDS ME OF THE DOLL I SAW IN YOUR OFFICE.
What's that?
...?
HMM?
XI
UH-HUH.
YOU CAN PICK THEM UP IF YOU SWITCH TO THE SATELLITE.
I LIKE THIS HOST'S SCREEN PRES-ENCE.
Today we've come to the captivating land of Australia!
OH!
IS THAT AN EARTH SHOW?

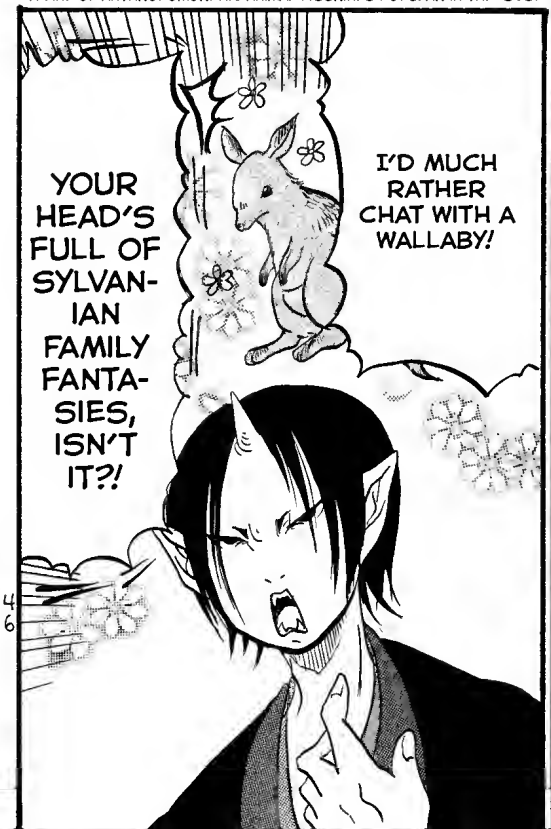
* MASCOT FOR A JAPANESE TV PROGRAM, DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD'S MYSTERIES.

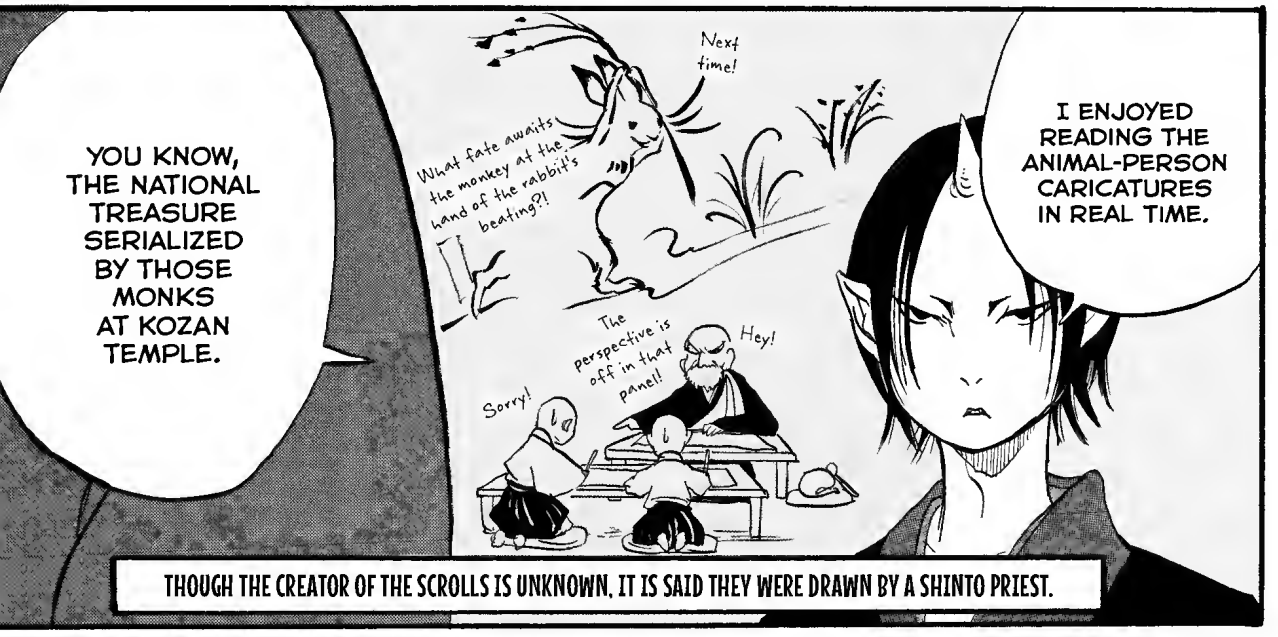
SIGH ...
I'D LOVE TO GO OVER-SEAS.
I GOT A MONGOL NATIVE OUTFIT WITH IT.
What a mysterious discovery!
WAS THAT A CRYSTAL HITOSHI-KUN DOLL?!
I'm not sure what to do with it.
THAT'S SO COOL, YET SO DRAB!

I WANT TO PLANT A FLAG ON AYERS ROCK AND YELL "CHICKEN RICE" AT THE TOP OF MY LUNGS.
HUH?
Apologies to the aborigionals
I'D RATHER TAKE A TRIP TO EARTH.
I'D LIKE TO SEE GODRIC'S HOLLOW SOME DAY.
ME, NEITHER.
I HAVEN'T BEEN OVERSEAS OUTSIDE OF FOR WORK IN A THOUSAND YEARS.
Maybe I could meet Harry Potter.
UGH...
Ayers Rock (Earth's bellybutton)
...MOTHER EARTH WILL GET A TUMMY ACHE!
YOU'RE SOUNDING LIKE MY MOTHER!
DON'T YOU DARE!
IF YOU PLANT A FLAG ON AYERS ROCK...
BE KIND TO ME FIRST!
ゴーゴリ
GRR GRR
XL
BE KIND TO THE PLANET!

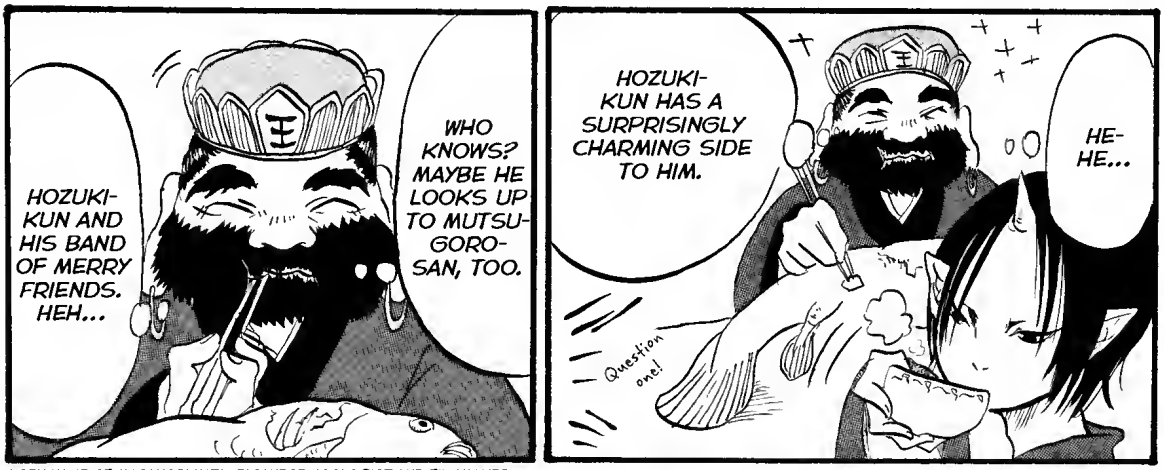


* A LINE OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC ANIMAL FIGURINES POPULAR IN THE '80S.





WHAT'S NICE ABOUT THAT?
うおおお


HE-HE...
HOZUKI-KUN HAS A SURPRISINGLY CHARMING SIDE TO HIM.
Question one!
WHO KNOWS? MAYBE HE LOOKS UP TO MUTSU-GORO-SAN, TOO.
HOZUKI-KUN AND HIS BAND OF MERRY FRIENDS. HEH...

* PEN NAME OF MASANORI HATA, JAPANESE ZOOLOGIST AND FILMMAKER.

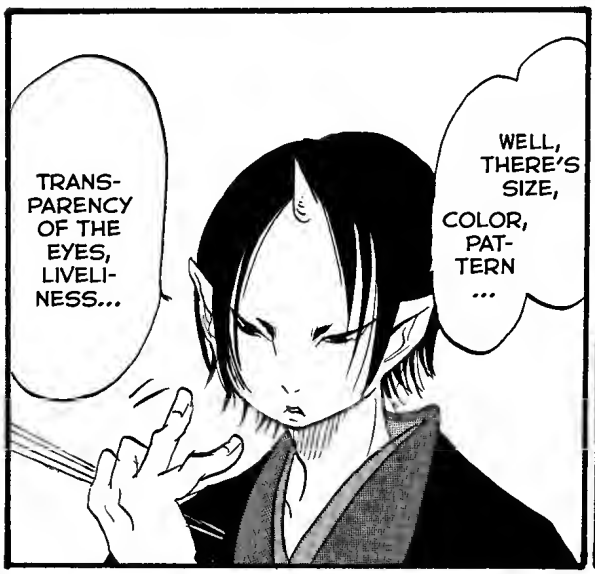
HUH? I ONLY KEEP GOLDFISH AT THE MOMENT.
HOZUKI-KUN! MAKE SURE YOU KEEP YOUR PETS SMALL, OKAY?!
NO GOOD! THIS SIMPLY WON'T DO!
XL

NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, MY OLDEST GOLDFISH HAS GROWN OVER 3 METERS NOW.
HE'S A JOLLY ONE. CARE TO SEE?
HE ALREADY HAD MERRY FRIENDS!

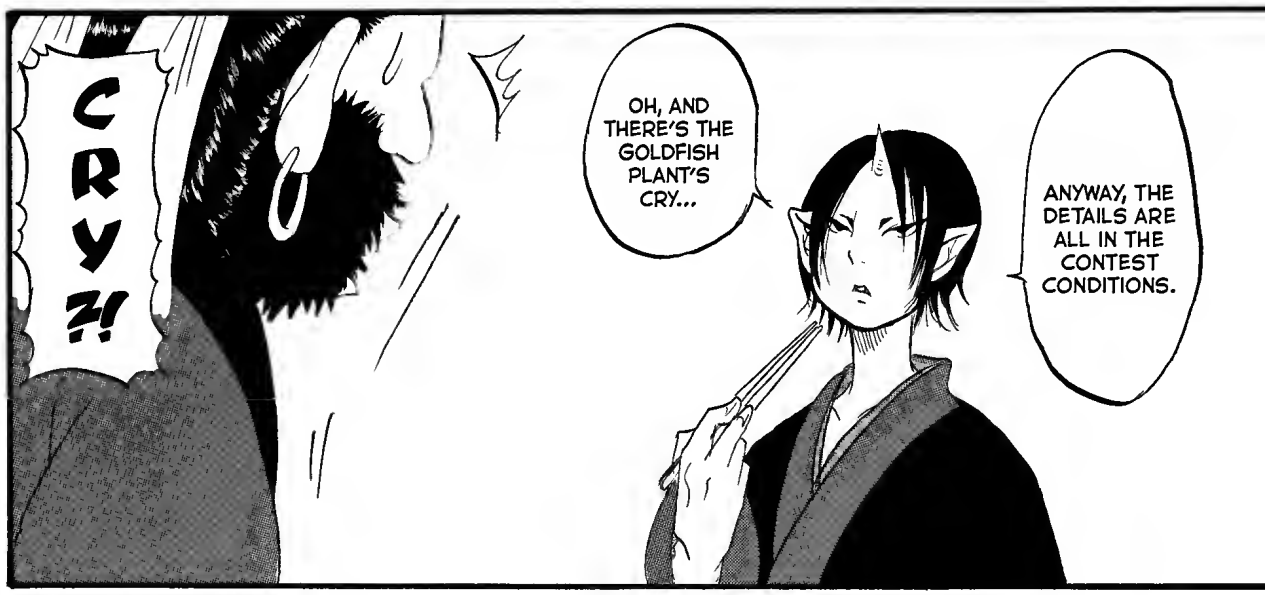
OH, YEAH. THOSE GOLD-FISH PLANTS, HUH?
SO... ARE THEY A PLANT OR AN ANIMAL?
GOOD QUESTION. I GUESS YOU'D CALL THEM AN ANIMAL-PLANT.

I GUESS YOU'LL BE TAKING FIRST PRIZE AT THIS YEAR'S GOLDFISH PLANT CONTEST, HUH?
NO ...
Sixth Annual Goldfish Plant Competition
THREE METERS, EH?
XL

YOU SURE GET AROUND.
I WON A SPACE IN THE HALL OF FAME A COUPLE YEARS BACK.
NOW I'M ON THE BOARD OF JUDGES.

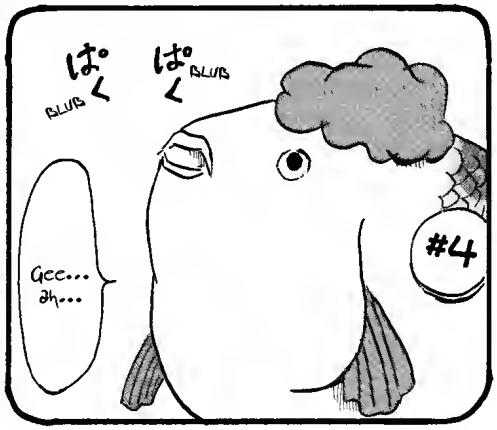

TRANS-PARENCY OF THE EYES, LIVELI-NESS...
WELL, THERE'S SIZE, COLOR, PAT-TERN ...

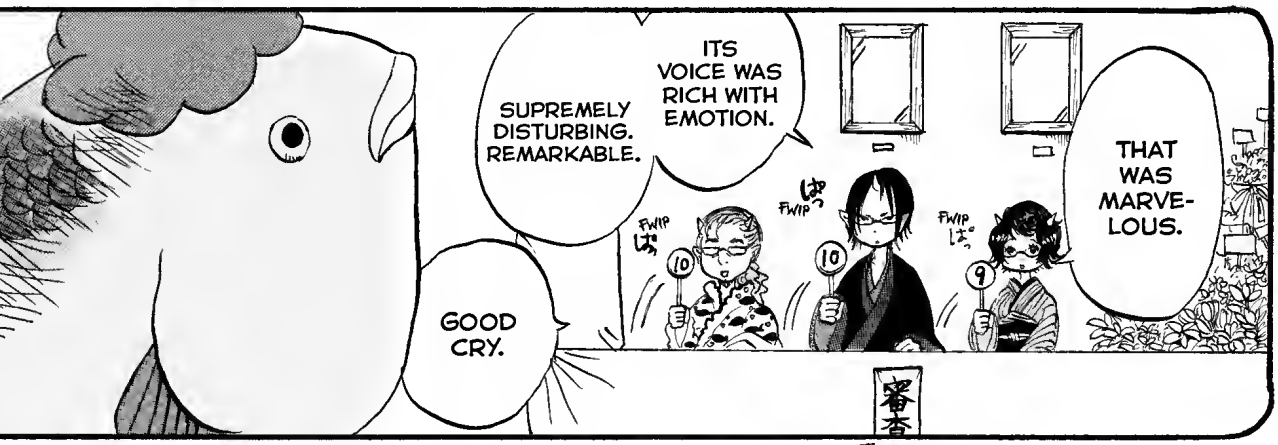
chomp
chomp
I DON'T REALLY GET HOW YOU JUDGE THAT SORT OF THING.


CRY?!
OH, AND THERE'S THE GOLDFISH PLANT'S CRY...
ANYWAY, THE DETAILS ARE ALL IN THE CONTEST CONDITIONS.

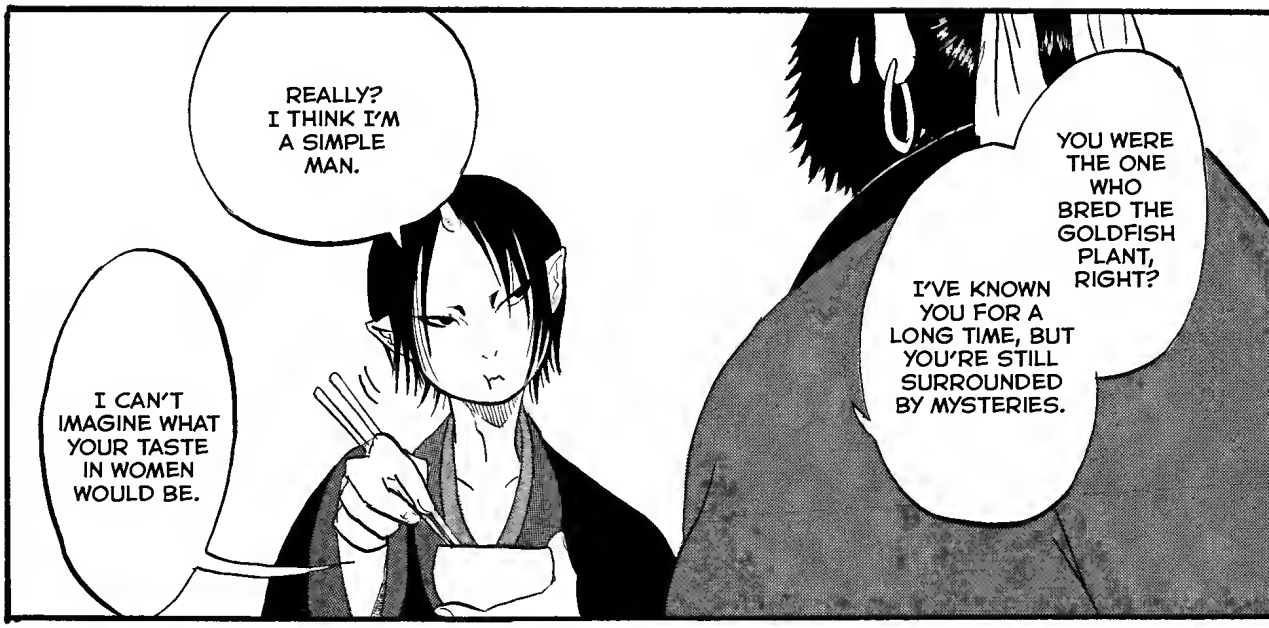
Og_yah!
Og_yah!
Og_yahh!
Ogyahh!
GAPE
#4

YOU CAN DO IT, MA-SAKO!
Next up, number four.
#4


ぱく BLUB
ぱく BLUB
Gee... ah...
#4

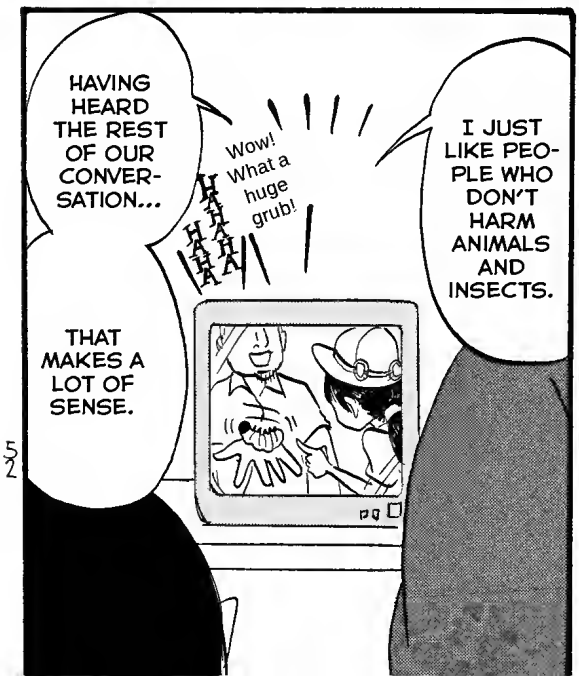

GOOD CRY.
SUPREMELY DISTURBING. REMARKABLE.
ITS VOICE WAS RICH WITH EMOTION.
THAT WAS MARVE-LOUS.
FWIP ぱっ
FWIP ぱっ
FWIP ぱっ
10
10
9
審査
Judges

王
YOU MEANT THAT KIND OF CRY?
THE KEEPER'S ABILITY TO TEACH THE GOLDFISH PLANT TRICKS IS A HIGHLIGHT OF THE CONTEST.

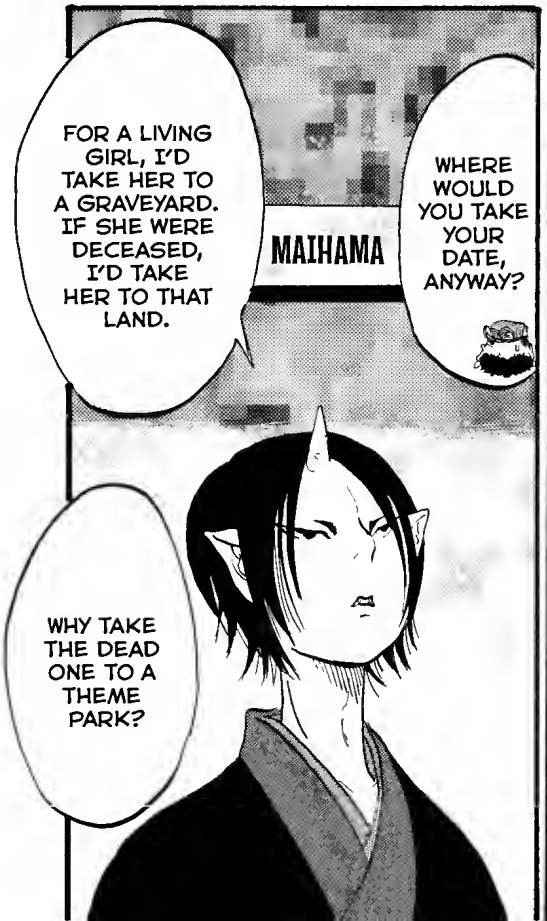

YOU WERE THE ONE WHO BRED THE GOLDFISH PLANT, RIGHT?
I'VE KNOWN YOU FOR A LONG TIME, BUT YOU'RE STILL SURROUNDED BY MYSTERIES.
REALLY? I THINK I'M A SIMPLE MAN.
I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT YOUR TASTE IN WOMEN WOULD BE.

HMM. SO SHE'S YOUR TYPE, HUH?
I'M NOT PARTICULAR ABOUT LOOKS.

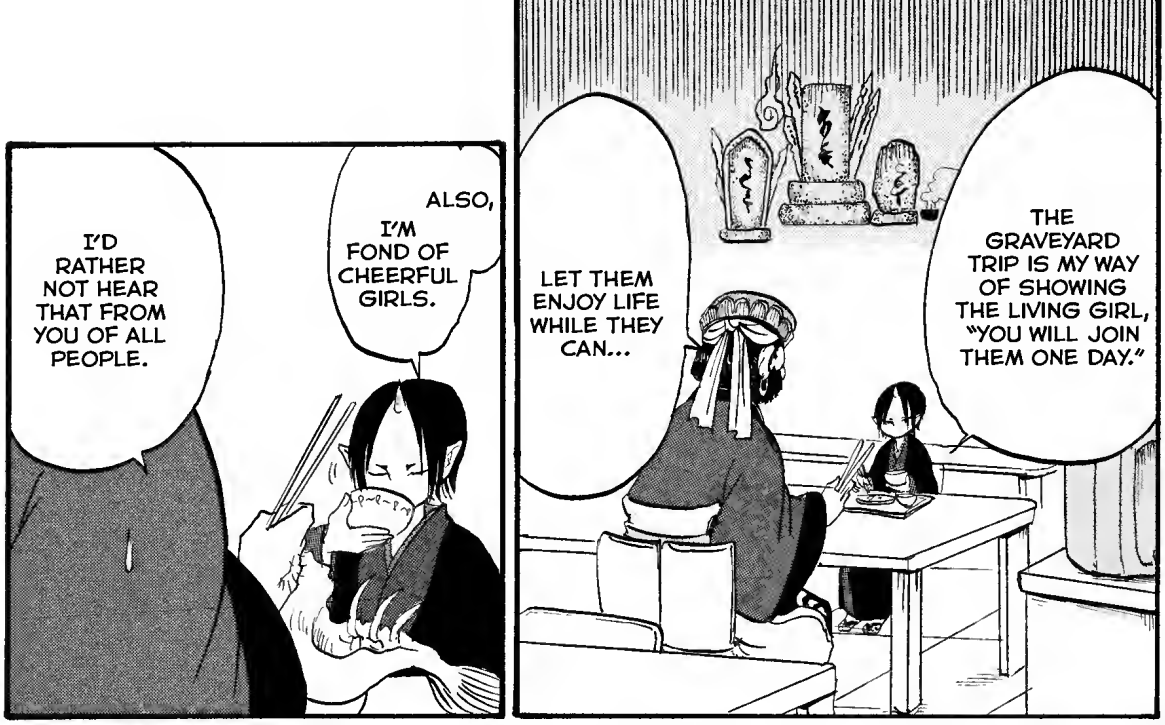
I THINK THIS GIRL IS RATHER CUTE.
SO MUCH THAT I HOPE SHE COMES OVER TO THIS SIDE EARLY.
CAFETERIA
Tea is free
MYSTERY HUNTER X HUNTER!


I JUST LIKE PEOPLE WHO DON'T HARM ANIMALS AND INSECTS.
Wow! What a huge grub!
HAHAHA
HAVING HEARD THE REST OF OUR CONVERSATION...
THAT MAKES A LOT OF SENSE.

We have cow eyes!
PEOPLE WHO THOUGHTLESSLY TORMENT ANIMALS WIND UP IN ANIMAL TORTURER HELL, AFTER ALL.
TRUE.
THAT'S A BIG NO-NO FOR HUMANS.


MAIHAMA
WHERE WOULD YOU TAKE YOUR DATE, ANYWAY?
FOR A LIVING GIRL, I'D TAKE HER TO A GRAVEYARD. IF SHE WERE DECEASED, I'D TAKE HER TO THAT LAND.
WHY TAKE THE DEAD ONE TO A THEME PARK?

I NEED A GIRL WHO CAN LAUGH WHILE BEING CONSTRICTED BY AN ANA-CONDA.
SO YOU DO LOOK UP TO MUTSU-GORO-SAN!
Someone's excited!
A HORRIFYING INCIDENT THAT WAS BROADCAST ON TV YEARS AGO.

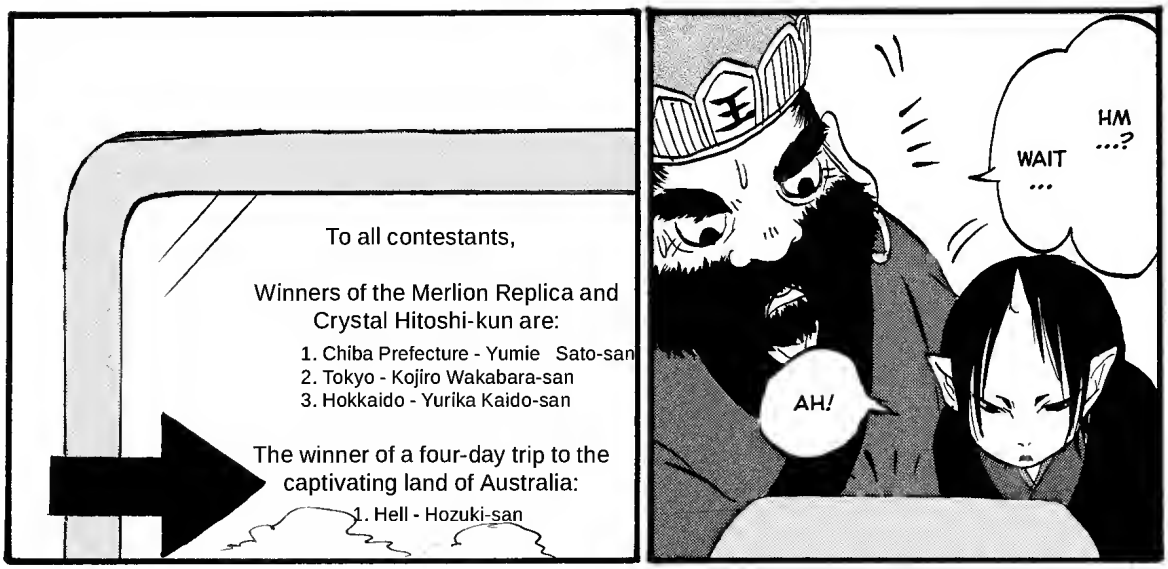

THE GRAVEYARD TRIP IS MY WAY OF SHOWING THE LIVING GIRL, "YOU WILL JOIN THEM ONE DAY."
LET THEM ENJOY LIFE WHILE THEY CAN...
ALSO, I'M FOND OF CHEERFUL GIRLS.
I'D RATHER NOT HEAR THAT FROM YOU OF ALL PEOPLE.

WHAT ON EARTH DO YOU MEAN? I LIVE EVERY DAY CHEERFUL AND OPENHEARTED.
AND YET I CAN'T FIND THE SMALLEST HINT OF CHEERFUL-NESS IN YOUR FACE.

TRUE...
XL
Chomp

WELL, IT'S GOOD THAT YOU CAN LIVE HAPPILY IN THIS AGE OF DIS-CONTENT.
IF I EVER FEEL DISCONTENT, I IMMEDIATELY WORK TO CORRECT IT.

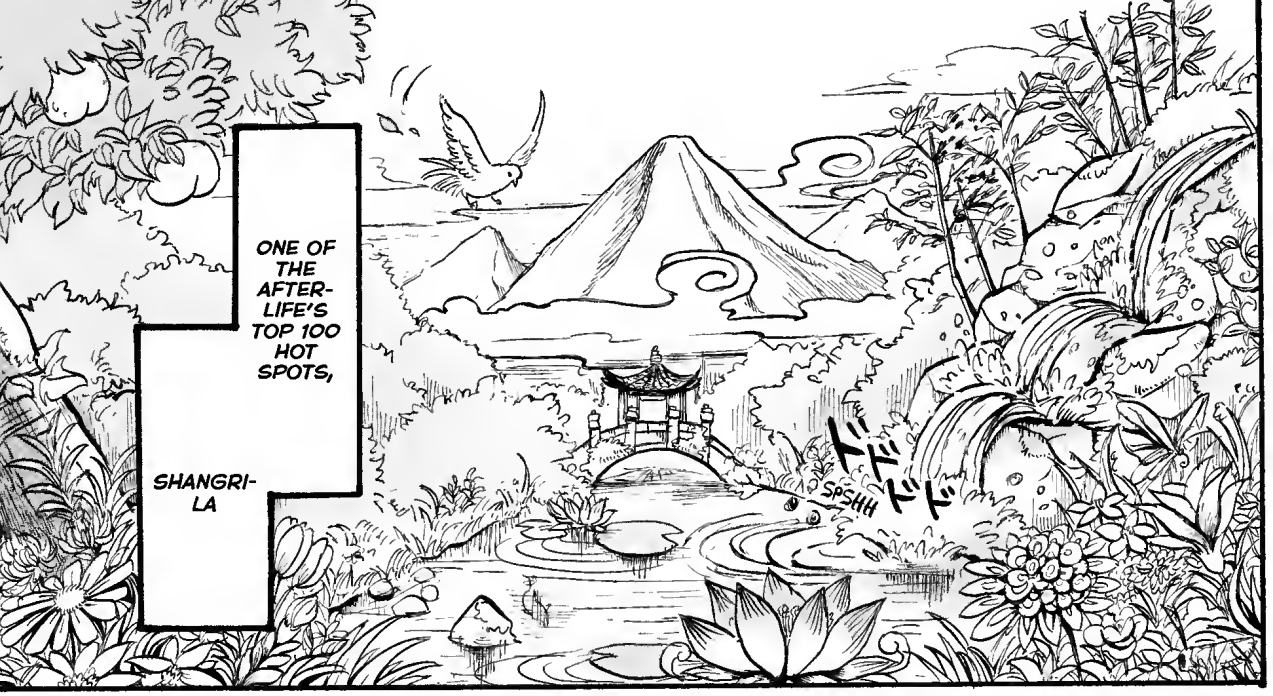
I GUESS YOU COULD SAY HELL FITS THE BILL, BUT...
AN ADVENTURE IN A FOREIGN LAND FULL OF ANIMALS AND NATURE!
RIGHT?
BUT A VACATION WOULD BE NICE EVERY NOW AND THEN.
XL
THEN AGAIN...
IN THE END, WE ALWAYS PUT THE TRIP OFF UNTIL "SOMEDAY".
This week was perfect!
I understand why fathers all over the world leave the planning to their wives.
PREPPING FOR TRIPS IS A REAL PAIN. YOU HAVE TO BUY TICKETS, BOOK A HOTEL...


To all contestants,
Winners of the Merlion Replica and Crystal Hitoshi-kun are:
1. Chiba Prefecture - Yumie Sato-san
2. Tokyo - Kojiro Wakabara-san
3. Hokkaido - Yurika Kaido-san
The winner of a four-day trip to the captivating land of Australia:
1. Hell - Hozuki-san
HM ...?
WAIT ...
AH!

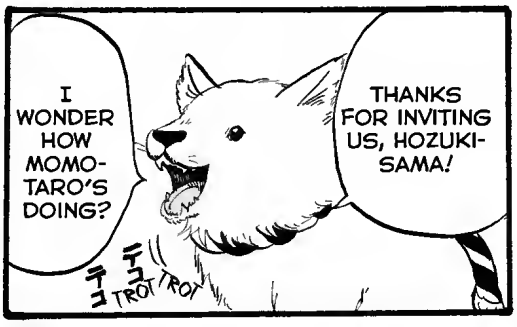
TAKE ME WITH YOU!
DON'T TRY TO STOP ME! I'M GOING!
LORD ENMA! I'M TAKING A PAID VACATION!
NO WAY!
CRYSTAL HITOSHI-KUN COUNT: 2
CLICK CLICK CLICK
YOU WON A FOUR-DAY TRIP TO AUS-TRALIA?!
CHAPTER THREE - END

...
WHAT'S WRONG, HOZUKI-KUN?
I PULLED AN ALL-NIGHTER...
THAT'S NO GOOD. YOU'LL GO BALD IF YOU DON'T GET PROPER REST.
GO BALD YOUR-SELF.
OH.
I NEED TO PAY A VISIT TO SHANGRI-LA.
IT SEEMS THE MED-ICINE I ORDERED IS READY.
L-LIKE THESE LOCKS WOULD LEAVE ME...
GOOD WORK.
THAT'S RIGHT. YOU DO MEDICINAL RESEARCH ON THE SIDE, DON'T YOU?
IF YOU'RE PICKING UP MEDICINE, THEN YOU'LL PROBABLY RUN INTO HAKU-TAKU-KUN, HUH?
YOU TWO SHARE A LOT IN COMMON.
NOT JUST YOUR FACE, BUT YOUR SHREWD-NESS, TOO.
YOU KNOW,
I GET THAT A LOT, BUT IT NEVER STOPS BEING INSULTING.

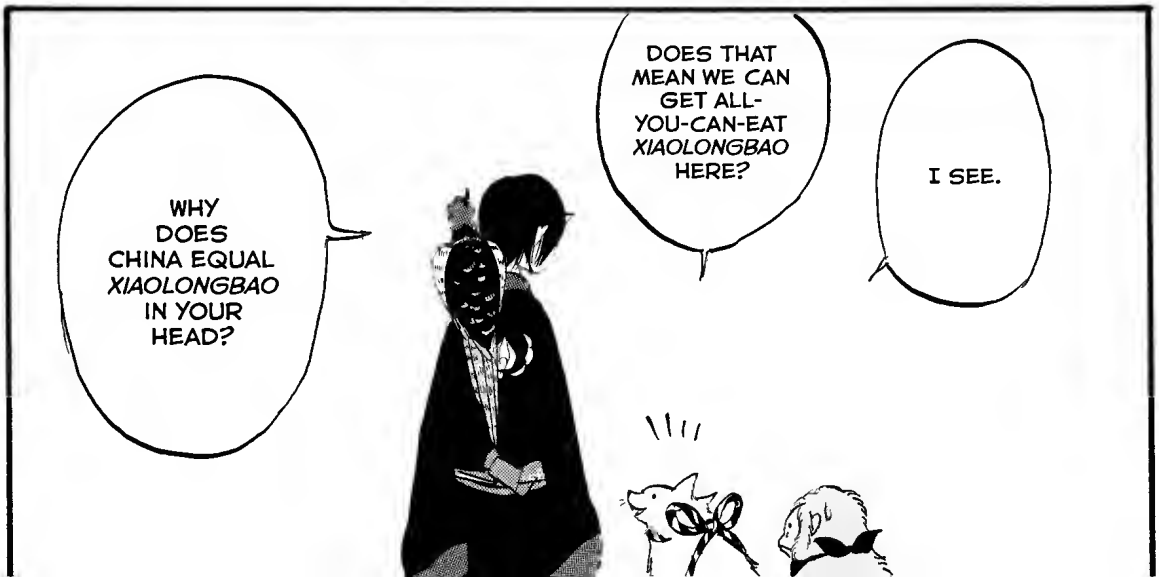
# CHAPTER 4
# HAKUTAKU

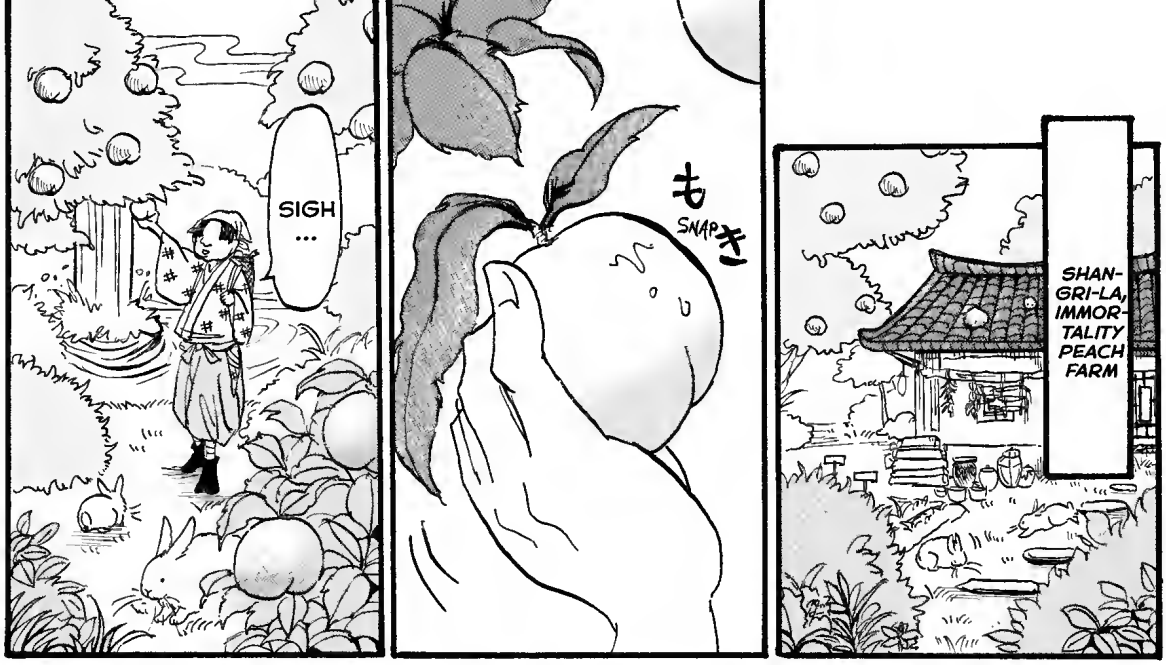


THE BUILDINGS ARE ALL CHINESE-STYLE.
WOW! NO WONDER THIS PLACE IS A TOURIST ATTRACTION.
SHANGRI-LA IS THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN JAPAN AND CHINA.
IT'S ALSO A COMMERCE HOT SPOT BETWEEN THE TWO.



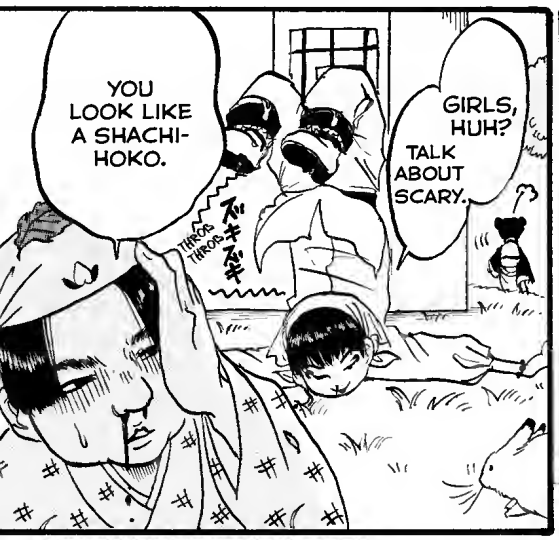

* A TYPE OF STEAMED BUN FROM THE JIANGNAN REGION OF CHINA.



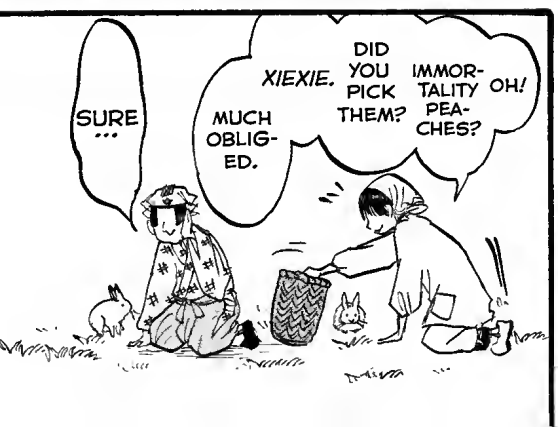

SIGH...
もき
SNAP
SHANGRI-LA, IMMORTALITY PEACH FARM

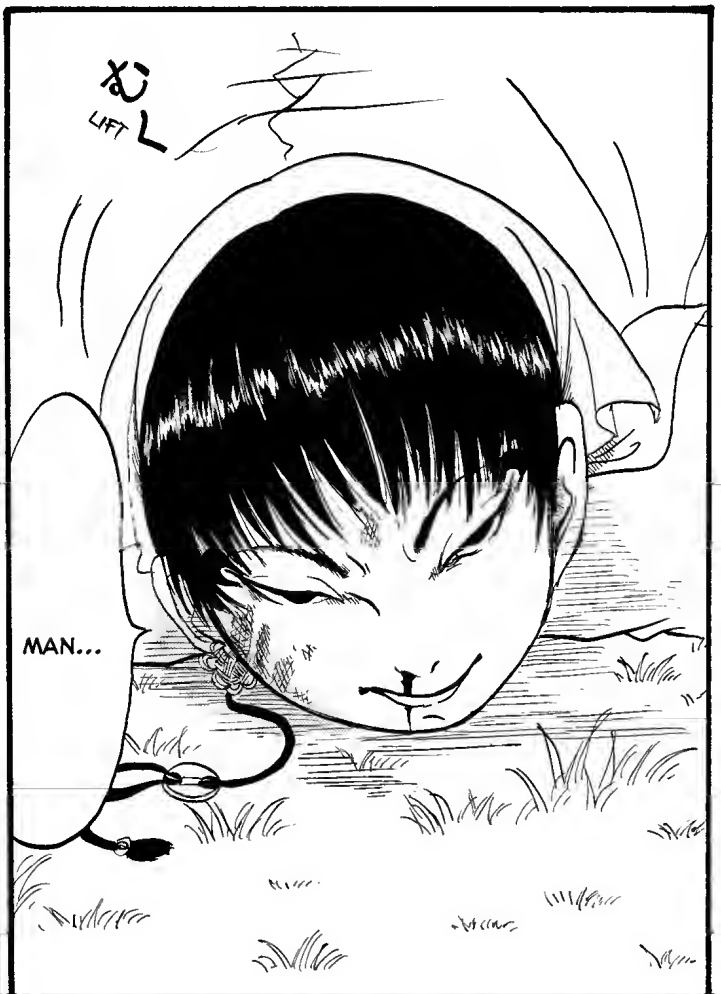
I'M SO BLESSED TO HAVE FOUND MY TRUE CALLING.
WHY EVER DID I DO SUCH FOOLISH THINGS BEFORE?
I FEEL MORE HANDSOME BY THE DAY.
JAPAN'S #1 FAMOUS HERO, MOMOTARO
(A THUG IN CH. 1, NOW A STRAPPING ADULT.)

FWOO
ぬもっ
I'VE FINISHED PICKING THE-
HAKU-TAKU-SAMA!
ガラガラ
RATTLE RATTLE
I REALIZE JUST HOW PITIFUL I WAS.
WHEN I THINK ABOUT HOW I WENT AROUND PICKING STUPID FIGHTS...



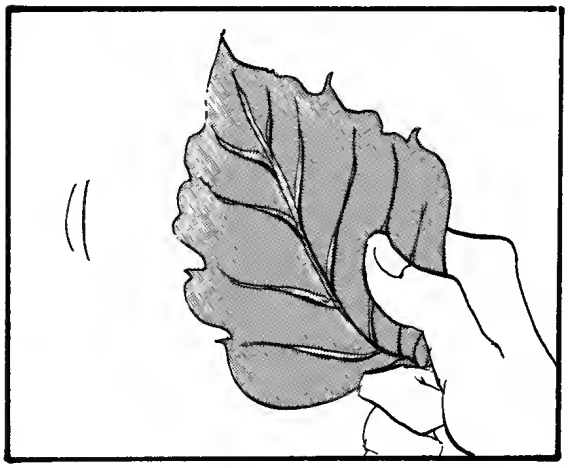

* AN ANIMAL FROM JAPANESE FOLKLORE WITH THE HEAD OF A TIGER AND THE BODY OF A CARP.

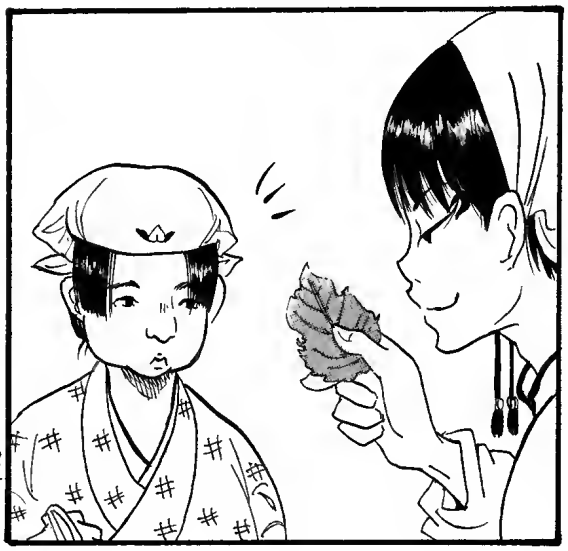


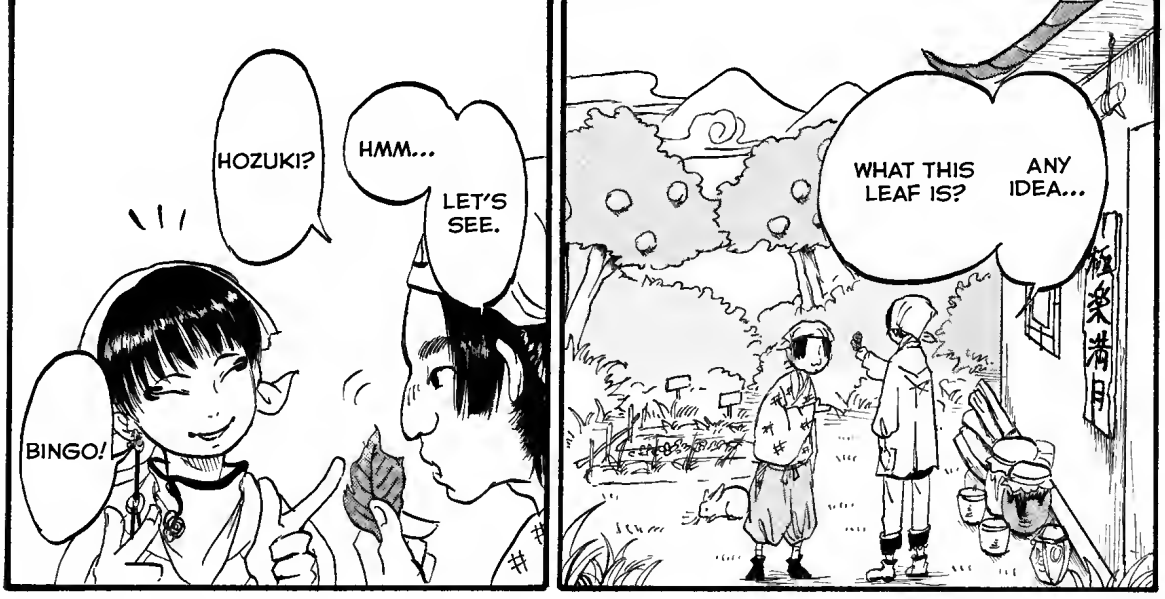
HOW STRANGE. RABBITS ARE IN HEAT ALL YEAR ROUND AND NO ONE THROWS A FIT.
BUT WHEN I ACT ON MY URGES, GIRLS GET MAD AT ME.
WE'RE BOTH PLAYBOYS.
THERE'S NOTHING STRANGE ABOUT IT...

SHE WAS THE NINTH, TO BE EXACT.
I THINK THAT'S THE EIGHTH GIRL I'VE SEEN SINCE I CAME HERE...





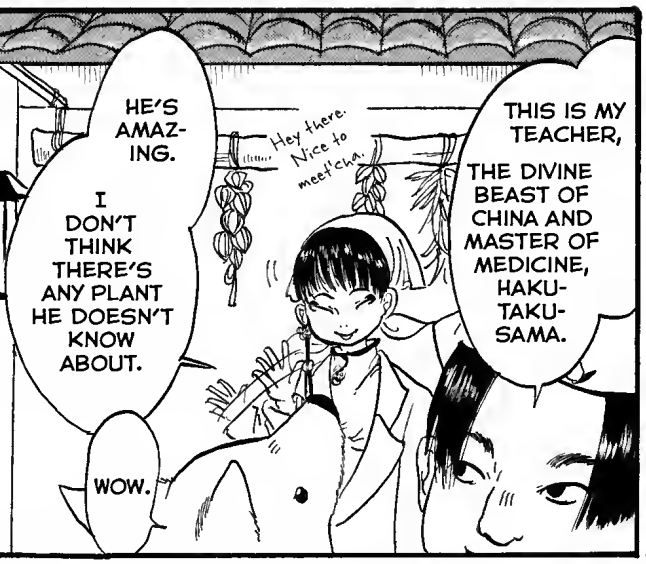
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
AH!
ARE YOU HURT?
OH...
I'M FINE, THANKS.
パン パン
PAT PAT


HOZUKI?
HMM...
LET'S SEE.
BINGO!
WHAT THIS LEAF IS?
ANY IDEA...

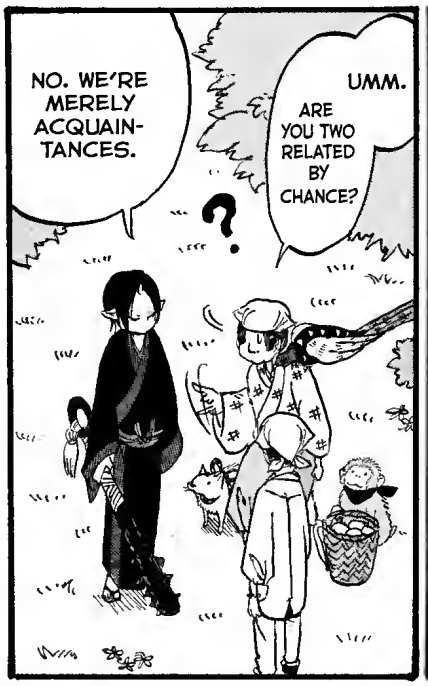
IN-DEED.
IT CONTAINS ALKALOIDS KNOWN AS HISTONES THAT ARE FEARED TO CAUSE MIS-CARRIAGES.
RIGHT, RIGHT...
SYMBOL-ICALLY, IT'S "THE RED LANTERN HELD BY THE DEAD."
ONE OF ITS EASTERN SPELLINGS INCLUDES THE CHINESE CHARACTER FOR SPIRIT.
IN ENGLISH, IT'S THE CHINESE LANTERN.
ITS JAPANESE NAME, CAN BE SPELLED TWO WAYS.
ITS ROOTS MAKE A NATURAL REMEDY, THAT CAN BE USED TO STOP COUGHS AND AS A DIURETIC.
HOWEVER, IT'S ALSO POISON-OUS. AL-THOUGH WEAK.
LONG AGO, PROSTITUTES USED IT FOR MAKESHIFT ABORTIONS.
PREG-NANT WOMEN SHOULD AVOID EATING THEM.

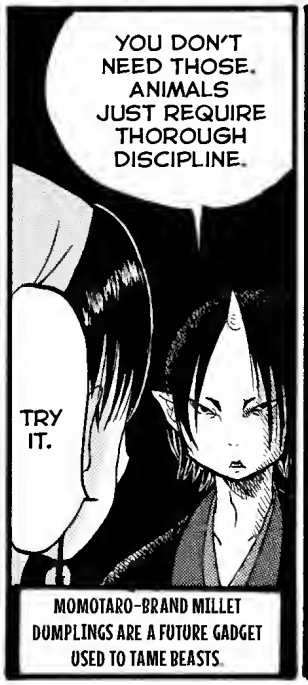
* REFERENCE TO THE SETSUBUN FESTIVAL WHERE PEOPLE THROW BEANS TO WARD OFF DEMONS.

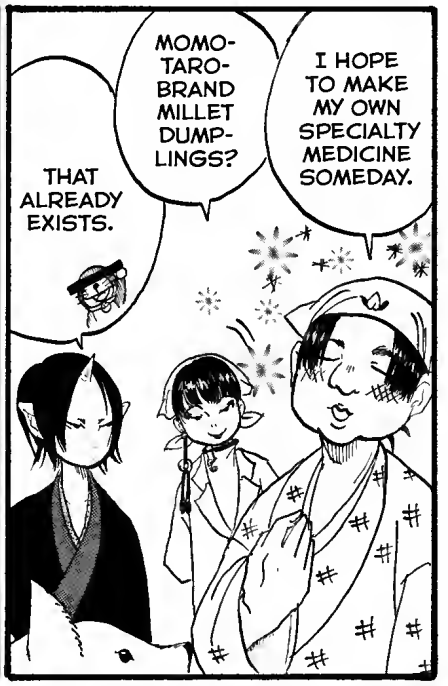
HOW'S THE NEW GIG WORKING OUT?
LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE GAINED SOME WEIGHT.
JUST DANDY.
HEY! THE WHOLE GANG IS HERE!
WOOF WOOF
MOMOTARO! WE CAME TO HANG OUT!
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN, MOMO-TARO?


HE'S AMAZING.
I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY PLANT HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT.
WOW.
Hey there. Nice to meet'cha.
THIS IS MY TEACHER,
THE DIVINE BEAST OF CHINA AND MASTER OF MEDICINE, HAKU-TAKU-SAMA.

I want the skills and qualifications to overcome this recession.
IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE A TRADE THESE DAYS.
I'M ALSO STUDYING MEDICINE NOW.
FABULOUSLY.
YOU'VE GROWN UP, MOMOTARO!


NO. WE'RE MERELY ACQUAINTANCES.
UMM. ARE YOU TWO RELATED BY CHANCE?
?


YOU DON'T NEED THOSE. ANIMALS JUST REQUIRE THOROUGH DISCIPLINE.
TRY IT.
MOMOTARO-BRAND MILLET DUMPLINGS ARE A FUTURE GADGET USED TO TAME BEASTS.


THAT ALREADY EXISTS.
MOMOTARO-BRAND MILLET DUMPLINGS?
I HOPE TO MAKE MY OWN SPECIALTY MEDICINE SOMEDAY.

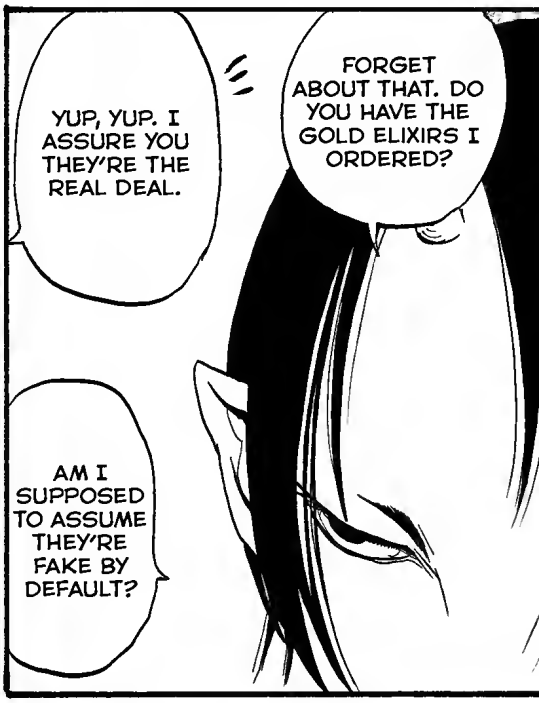
TCH
WHAT A COINCIDENCE. I LOATHE YOU, TOO.
WELL, TO PUT IT BLUNTLY, I DESPISE THIS GUY.

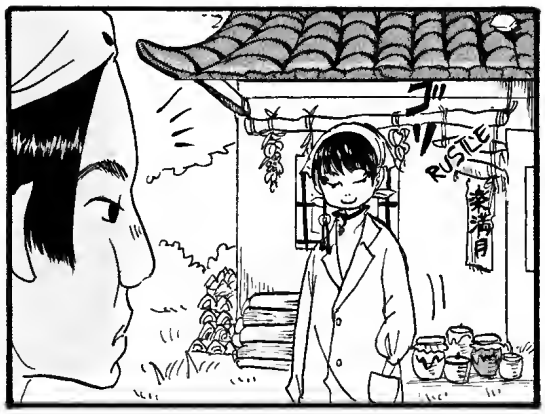
BUT I TRY MY BEST TO AVOID HIM.
YEAH. YOU COULD SAY WE GO WAY BACK.
WE BOTH HAPPEN TO BE RESEARCHING EASTERN MEDICINE.
HUH? WHY?

HEY, BIG GUY.
WHY DON'T YOU DOWN THIS REAL QUICK?
I INSIST.
YOU CAN TRUST THIS MAN'S KNOWLEDGE, BUT BE WARY OF HIS TONGUE.
BE WARNED, MOMO-TARO.
GULP
GULP
TANK

I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW I'M THE SYMBOL OF GOOD OMENS.
NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE THAT IF I WERE RELATED TO SOME DEMON OF DARK-NESS!
I SEE ...
HAKU-TAKU DEPI-CTION

ON THE FIRST FEW PAGES, NO LESS.
YOU'LL FIND THE PHRASE, "IS THIS REAL?" INCLUDED.
IN ANY TRAVEL-USE CHINESE PHRASE BOOK YOU BUY AT A DOLLAR STORE,
IT MUST BE IMPOR-TANT.


FORGET ABOUT THAT. DO YOU HAVE THE GOLD ELIXIRS I ORDERED?
YUP, YUP. I ASSURE YOU THEY'RE THE REAL DEAL.
AM I SUPPOSED TO ASSUME THEY'RE FAKE BY DEFAULT?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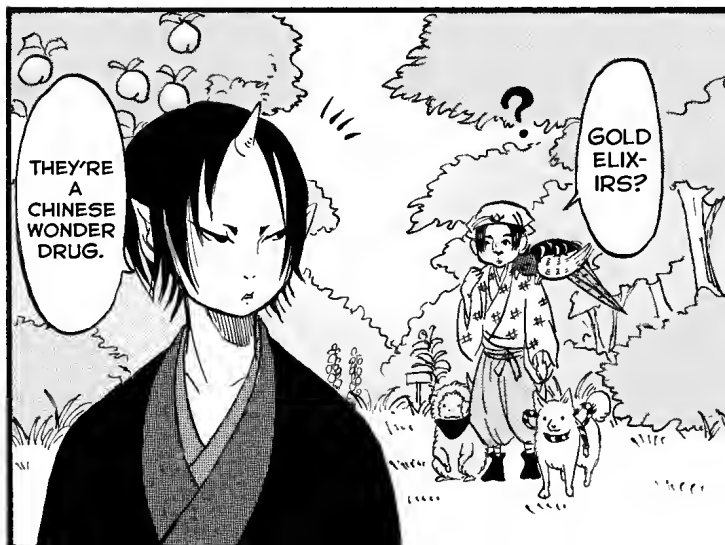
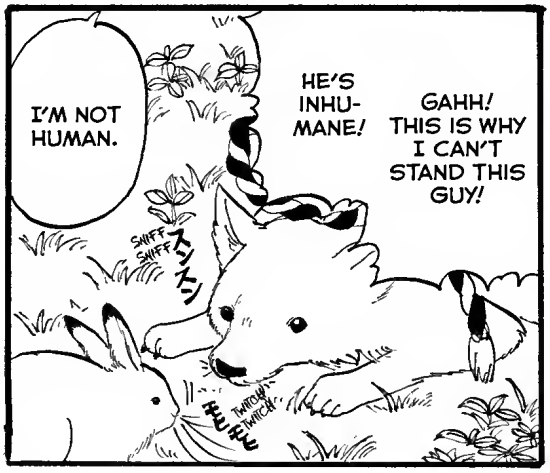
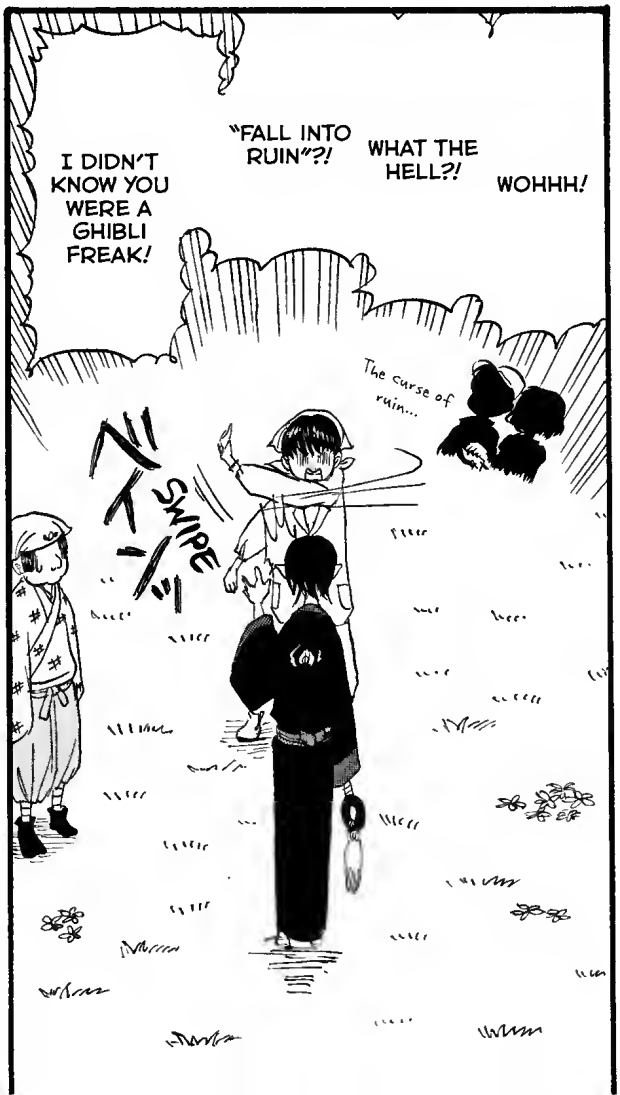
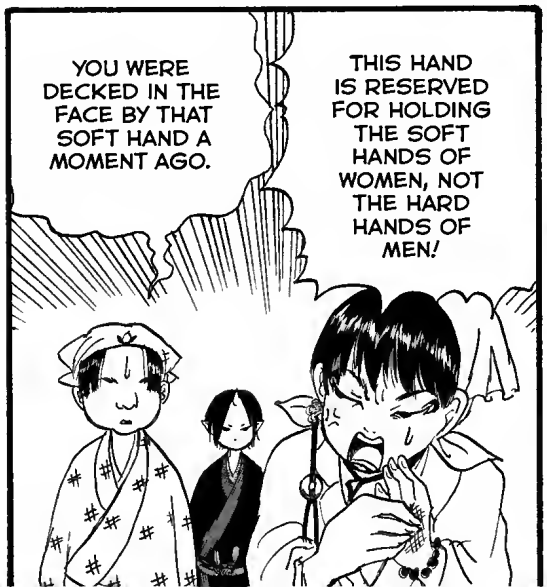

GOLD ELIX-IRS?
THEY'RE A CHINESE WONDER DRUG.

BUT HE IS LORD ENMA'S AIDE, AFTER ALL.
I WOULDN'T HAND SOMETHING LIKE THIS OVER TO THIS FREAK IF IT DIDN'T HAVE TO DO WITH RESEARCH.
WOW.
IT'S LIKE A GEM.
コロン
THIS.
THEY'RE QUITE VAL-UABLE.
ポン PLOP
WH-WHAT ...?
TWITCH ビッ
CRUNCH CRUNCH ガリガリ
?
HUH? TALK ABOUT CREEPY...
GRRR ビビビ...

* REFERENCE TO THE MOVIE, CASTLE IN THE SKY

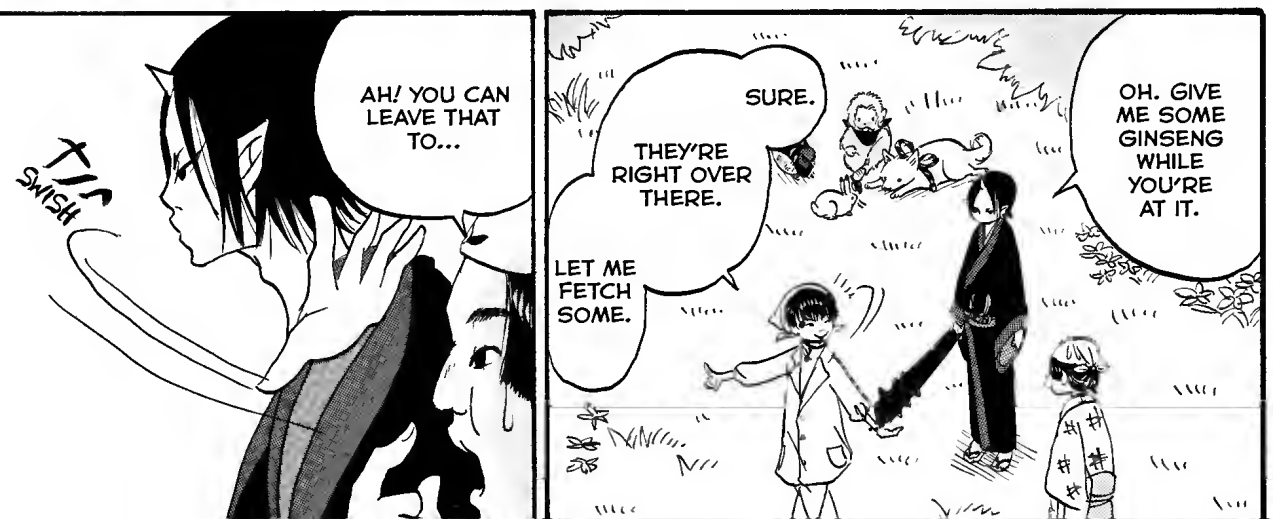




YOU WERE DECKED IN THE FACE BY THAT SOFT HAND A MOMENT AGO.
THIS HAND IS RESERVED FOR HOLDING THE SOFT HANDS OF WOMEN, NOT THE HARD HANDS OF MEN!

IT'S PROBABLY POINTLESS TO WARN YOU,
BUT YOU'LL GO TO HELL SOMEDAY AT THIS RATE.
I DID NOT!
AHH. DID YOU GET DUMPED AGAIN?

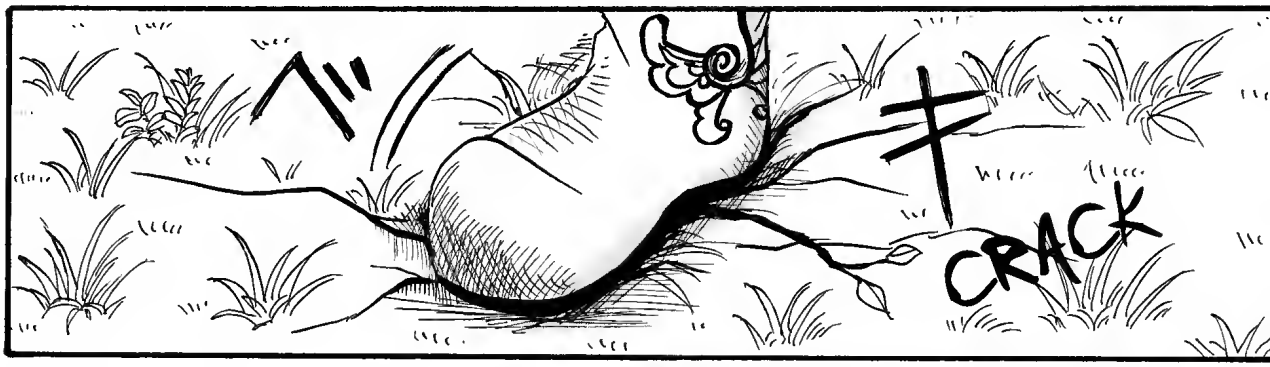

SOMETHING TELLS ME YOUR MATH IS OFF. DON'T TRY TO CHEAT ME.
100,000 YEN WILL SUFFICE.
FORGET ABOUT THAT. THE ELIXIRS WILL BE 5,000 YUAN.
C'mon! Hand over the world renowned Japanese bank notes.
SLAP
EXCHANGE RATE: ONE YUAN = ROUGHLY 12 YEN (AS OF MAY 2011)

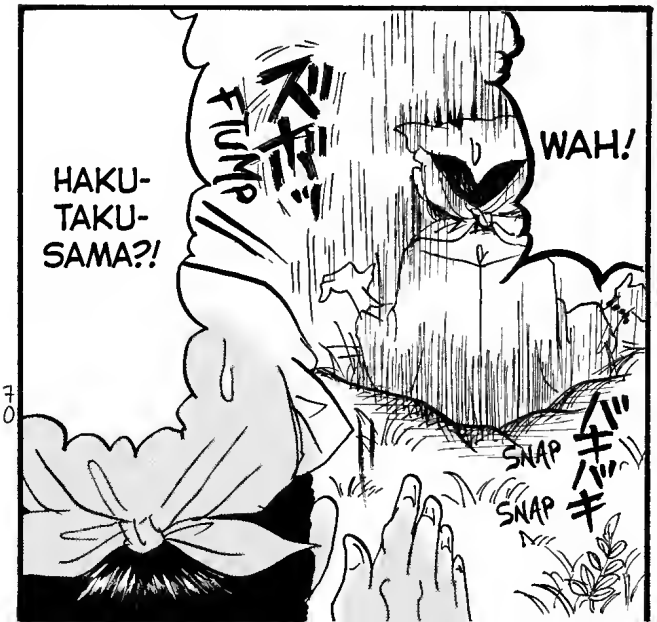

AH! YOU CAN LEAVE THAT TO...
SWISH
SURE.
THEY'RE RIGHT OVER THERE.
LET ME FETCH SOME.
OH. GIVE ME SOME GINSENG WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.

SHAKE SHAKE
YEAH, RIGHT!
JUST ONE THING, HAKU-TAKU-SAN.
EVEN DIVINE BEASTS ARE SUBJECT TO PUNISHMENT.

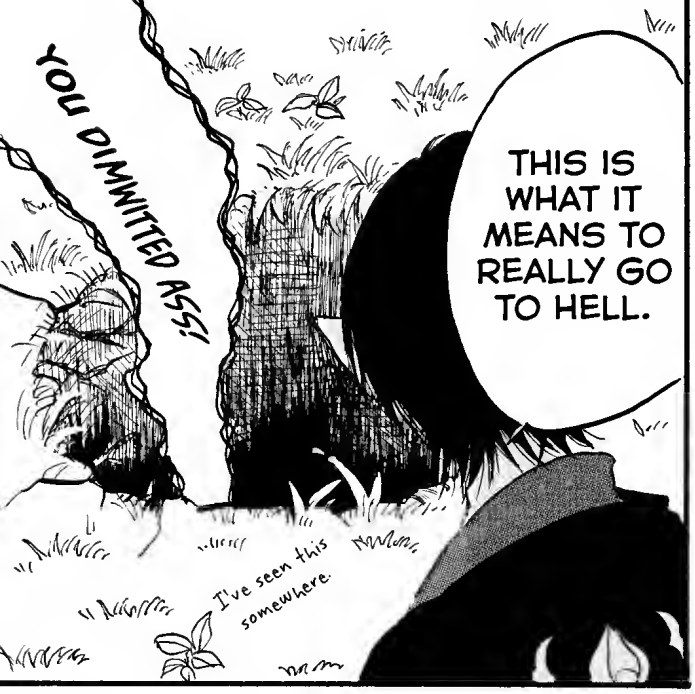
HUH?
IT'S ALL RIGHT. LET HIM GO.
BUT HE'S MY SUPERIOR.

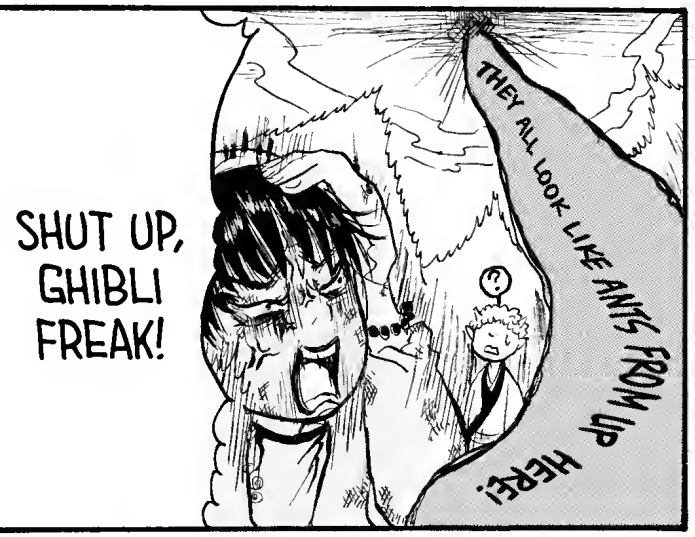
SOMEONE OUGHT TO PUNISH YOU.


CRACK


HAKU-TAKU-SAMA?!
WAH!
SNAP
SNAP

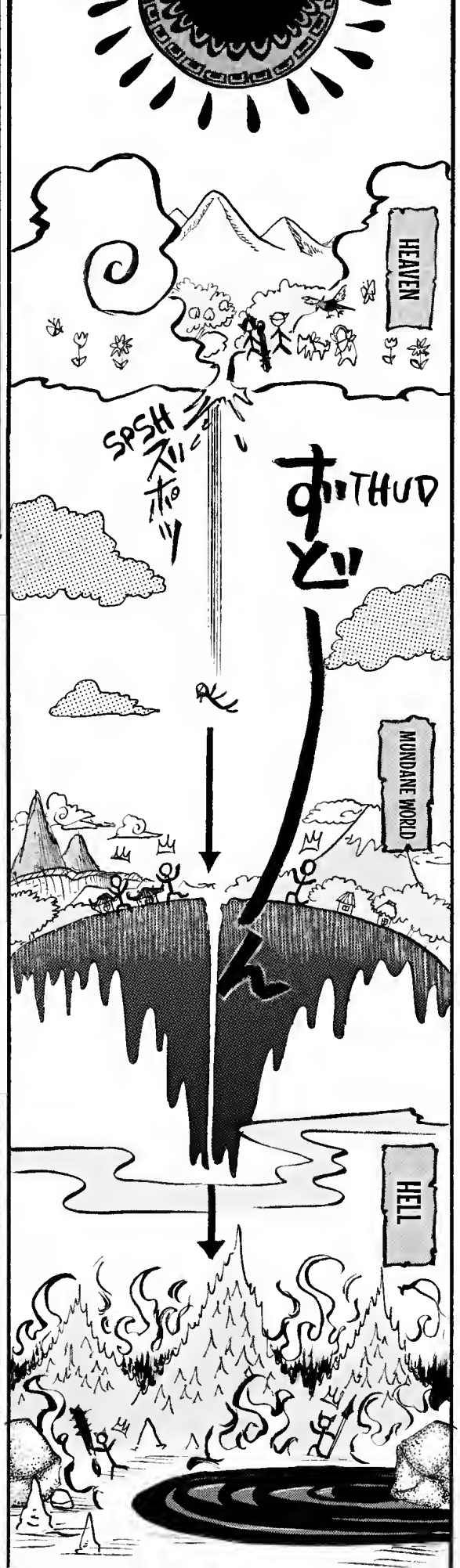
SLUMP
HUH?!

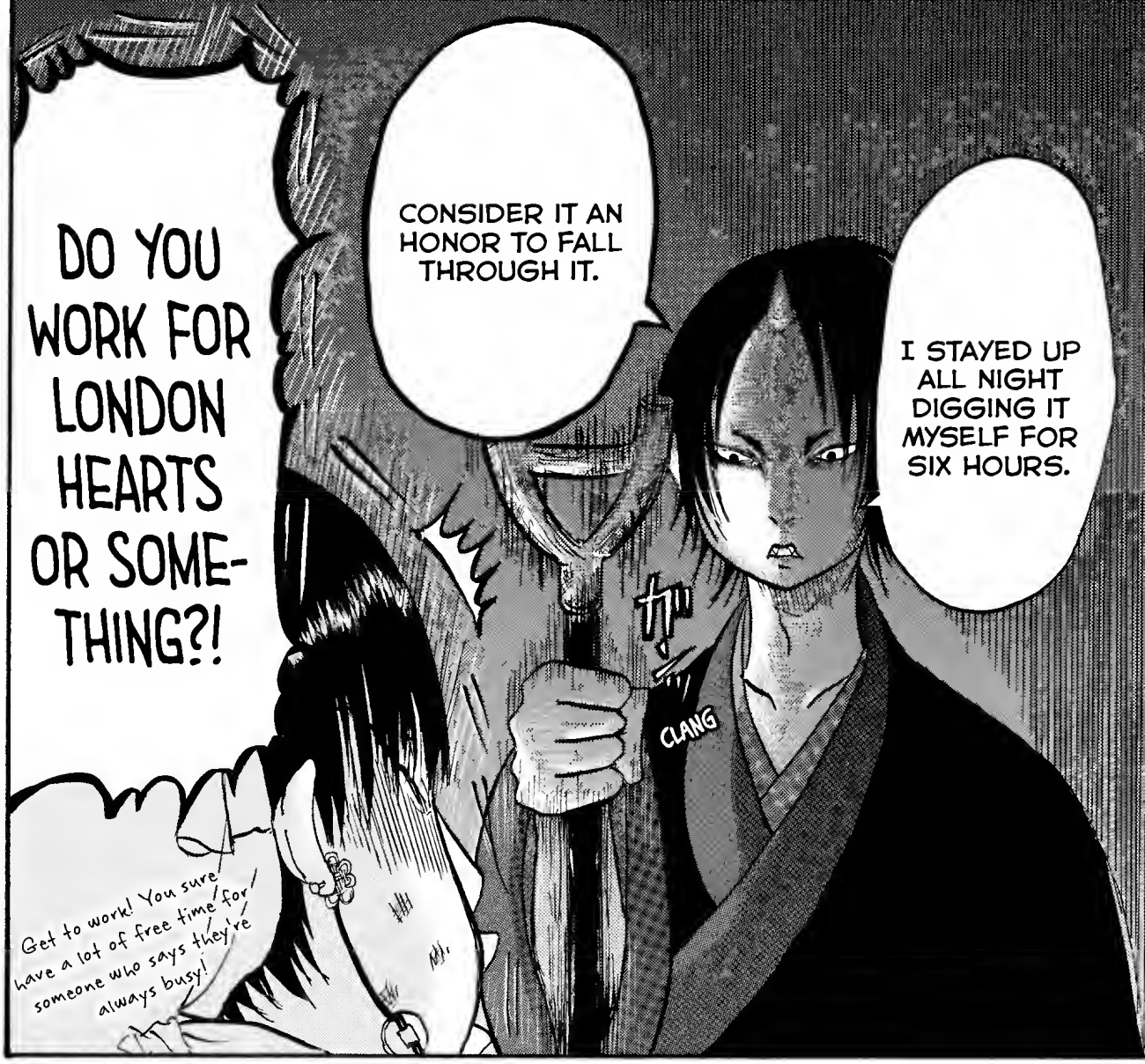



* ANOTHER CASTLE IN THE SKY REFERENCE.

I SWEAR THIS HOLE WASN'T HERE YESTERDAY.
FREAKY...
ズル :SLIP
OW OW OW ...
HOW DID HE CLIMB BACK UP...?
That's the power of a divine beast for you.
ドキ
BADUMP BADUMP




DO YOU WORK FOR LONDON HEARTS OR SOME-THING?!
CONSIDER IT AN HONOR TO FALL THROUGH IT.
I STAYED UP ALL NIGHT DIGGING IT MYSELF FOR SIX HOURS.
CLANG
Get to work! You sure have a lot of free time for someone who says they're always busy!

* LONDON HEARTS: A JAPANESE VARIETY SHOW WITH A FOCUS ON ELABORATE PRANKS.

WEIRD HOW PEOPLE OF A SIMILAR NATURE OFTEN BUTT HEADS...
CHAPTER FOUR - END
PAY FOR THE DRUGS AND GO BACK TO HELL, DAMN IT!
IT WAS WORTH STAYING UP ALL NIGHT FOR.
IF YOU WERE HUMAN, YOU WOULD HAVE GONE TO MASS SKEWERING HELL LONG AGO.
WHAP
WHAP
MASS SKEWERING HELL: A LESSER HELL WHERE THOSE WHO LIVE IN DEBAUCHERY GO.

Hakutaku

A well known yokai among fans of spiritual lore. I collected Yokai Netsuke (the kind packed in with snacks) as a student but never managed to get my hands on Hakutaku or the Kappa. In my desperation, I even dragged my parents into my search but was only left with this silly memory.

I kept them all in a large cookie container and often looked at my collection.

Line one and two of the Netsuke sold for 200 yen (about 2 USD) per box and the figure inside was random.

Candy

I think line two's secret character might have been Hakutaku, but my memory is vague.

Line one's secret character was the esteemed Lord Enma.

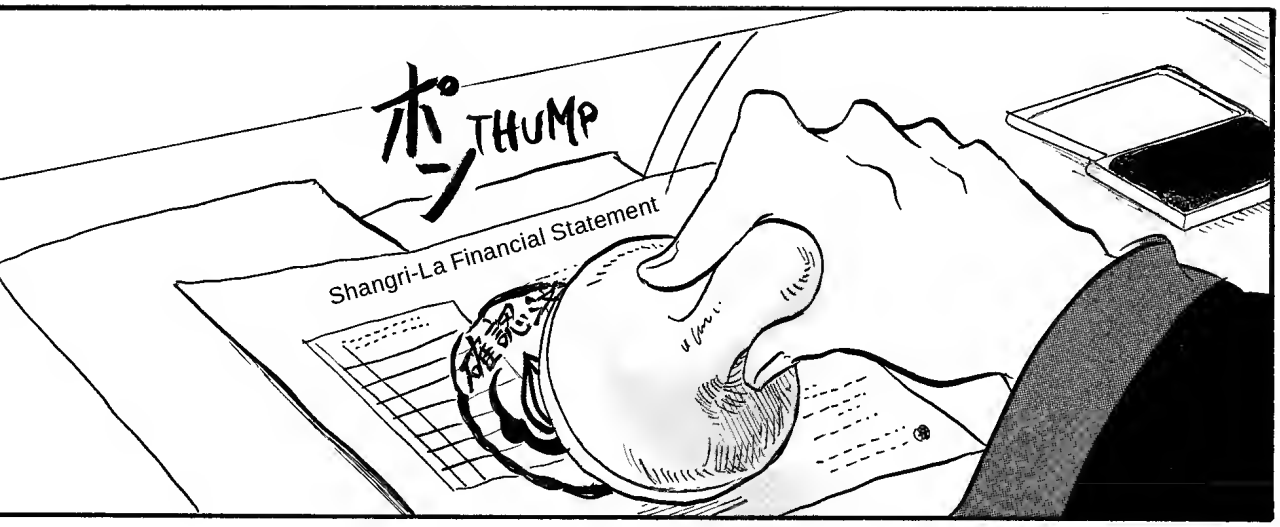
I remember getting six Nurarihyon figures in a row.

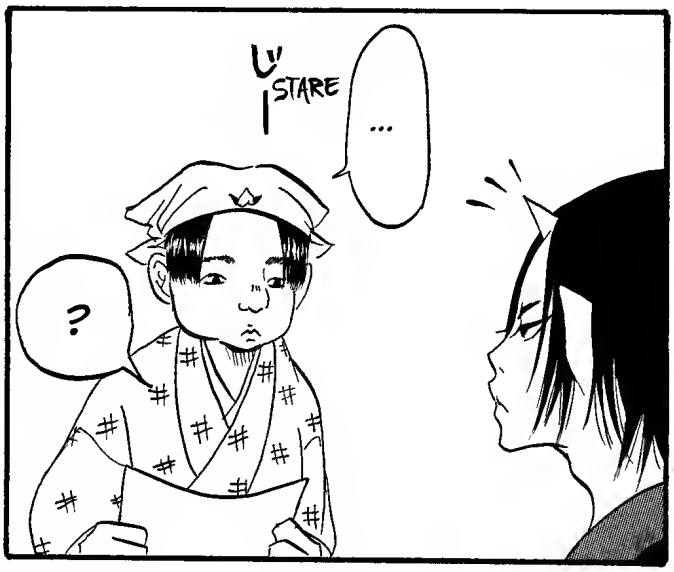
Never too old to get busy, huh?

The origin of Momotaro's birth actually stems from a legend in which an old couple ate a peach that flowed downstream and granted them their youth again. They went on to have a child together.

Momotaro

# Fun With Painting


ポン
THUMP
Shangri-La Financial Statement

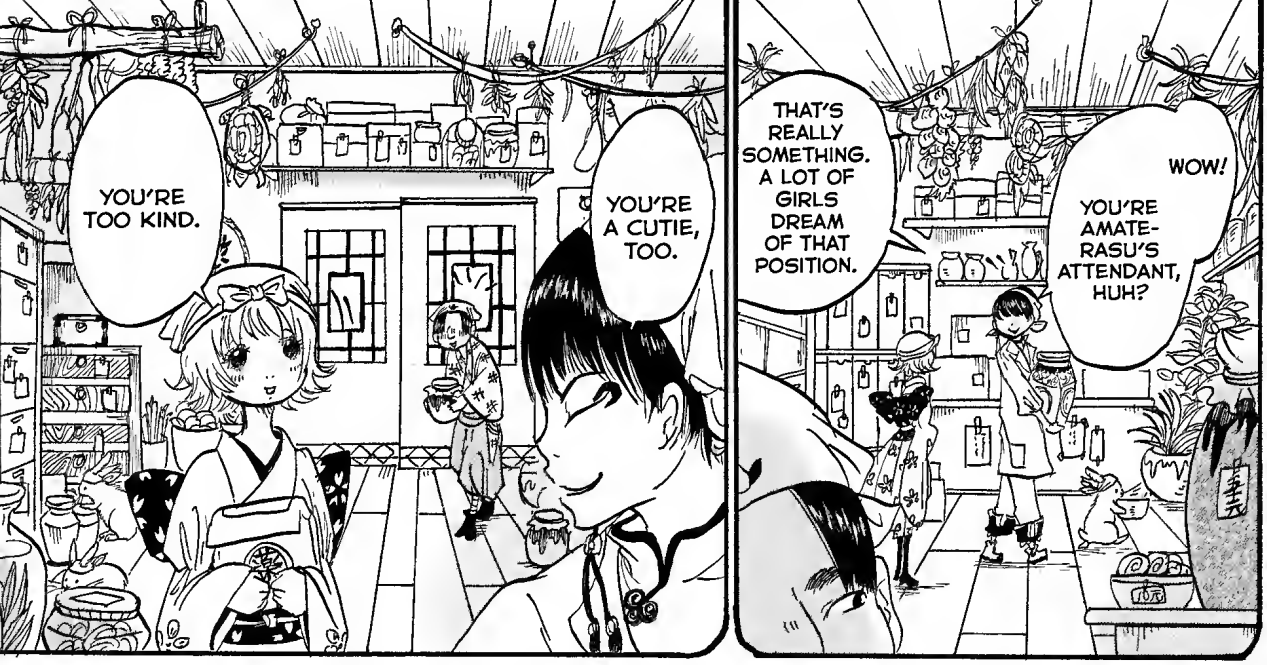

じ
STARE
...
?

SURE.
GIVE THIS TO HAKUTAKU-SAN, PLEASE.
HERE YOU ARE.

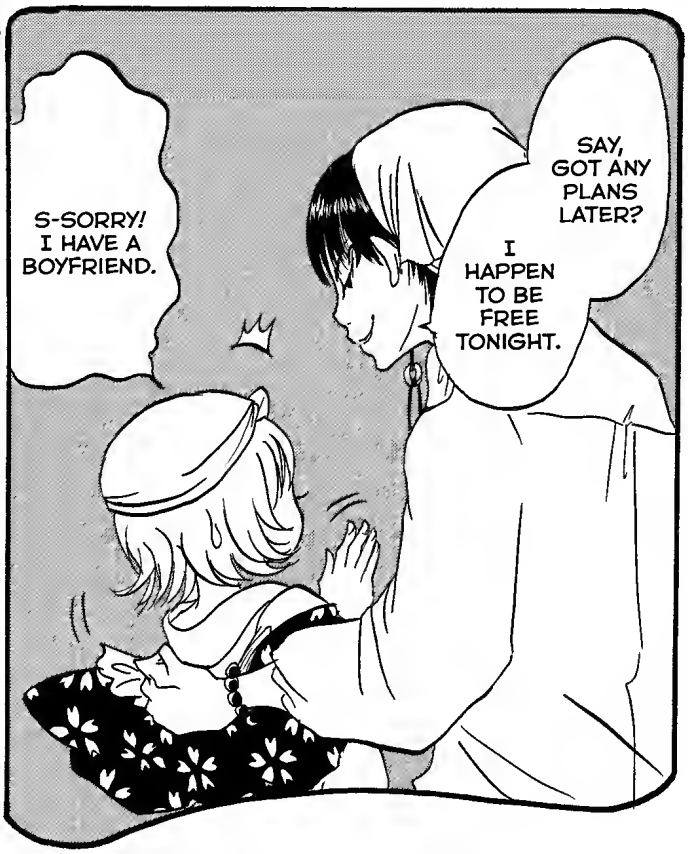
LIKE YOUR SLIT EYES, FOR ONE...
YOU KNOW, YOU AND HAKUTAKU-SAN REALLY DO LOOK ALIKE, HOZUKI-SAN.

# CHAPTER 5 WHAT BIRTHED THEIR DISCORD?

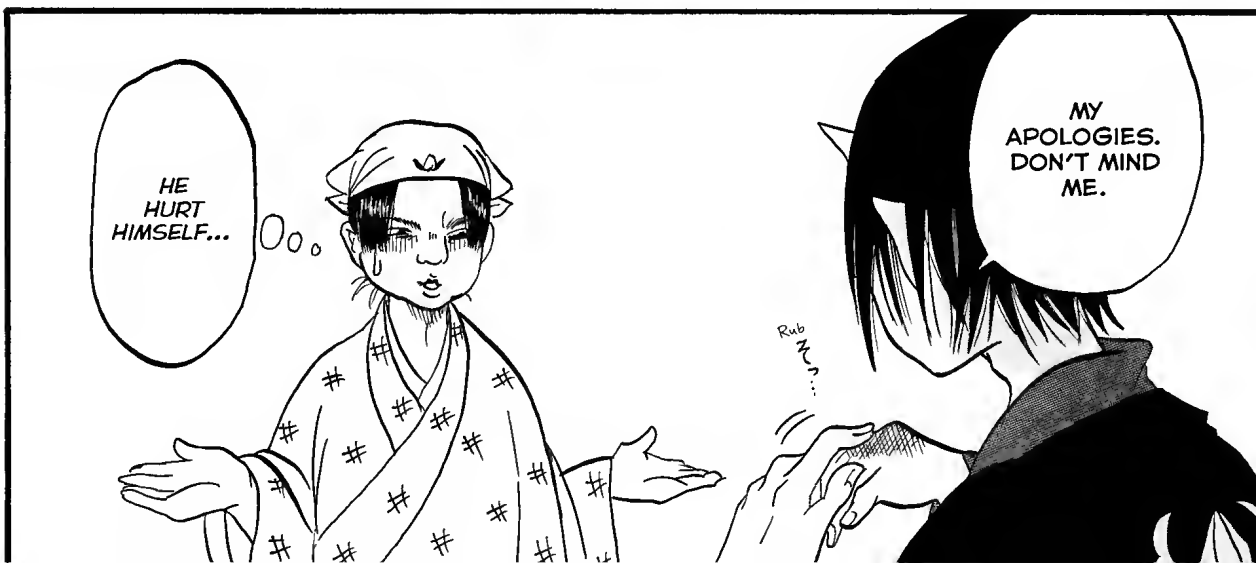

PLAY BOY

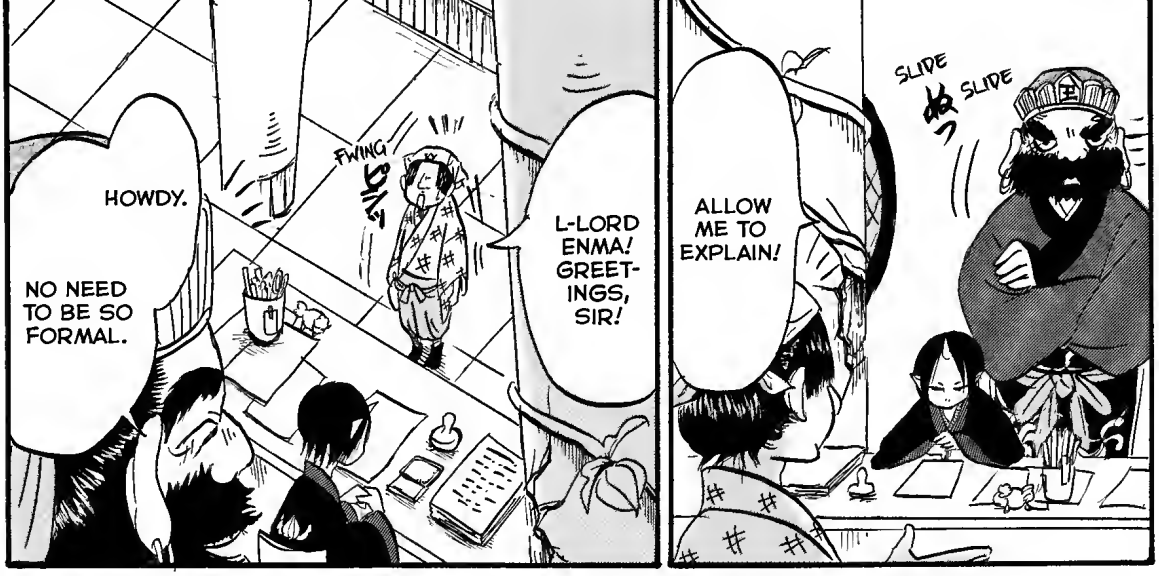

YOU'RE TOO KIND.
YOU'RE A CUTIE, TOO.
THAT'S REALLY SOMETHING. A LOT OF GIRLS DREAM OF THAT POSITION.
WOW! YOU'RE AMATE-RASU'S ATTENDANT, HUH?

* AMATERASU: GOD OF THE SUN AND UNIVERSE.



CRMB
CRMB
CRMB
CRRSH
TWITCH


MY APOLOGIES. DON'T MIND ME.
Rub
HE HURT HIMSELF...


HOWDY.
NO NEED TO BE SO FORMAL.
FWING
L-LORD ENMA! GREET-INGS, SIR!
ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN!
SLIDE
SLIDE

HE HAS A MIND LIKE A STEEL TRAP IN MOST SITUA-TIONS,
BUT HE LOSES HIS COOL WHENEVER HE'S COMPARED TO HAKUTAKU-KUN.
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
OH... I'M SORRY.

王
HOZUKI-KUN HATES IT WHEN PEOPLE SAY HE RESEMBLES HAKUTAKU-KUN.

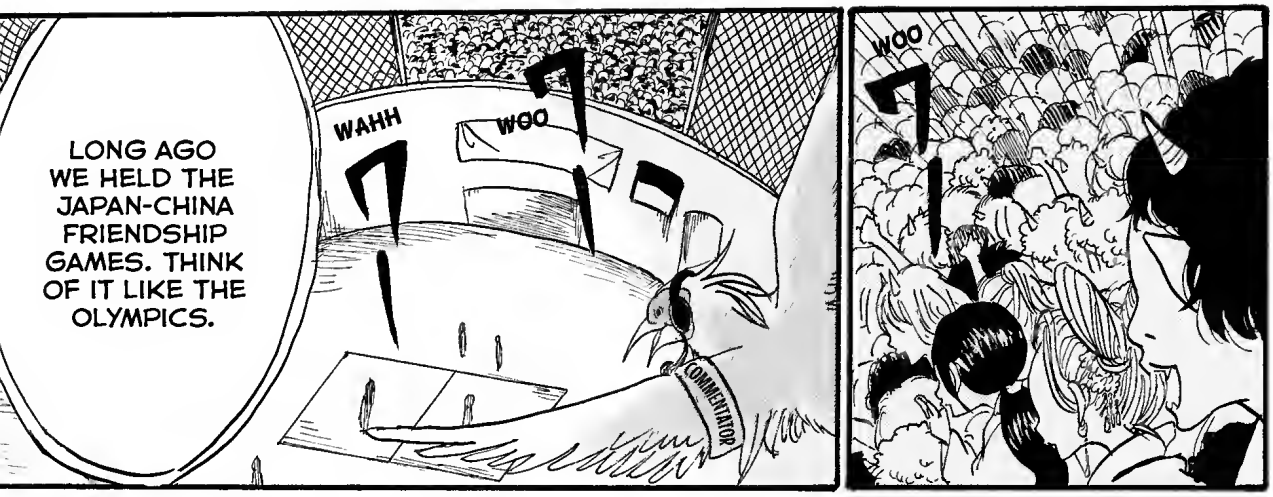
FWOO
王
HA-HA-HA!
THAT'S WHY I OCCASIONALLY BUST IT OUT AS A WAY OF GETTING BACK AT HOZUKI-KUN.

THUNK

WHY ARE YOU ON SUCH BAD TERMS?
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN IN THE PAST?

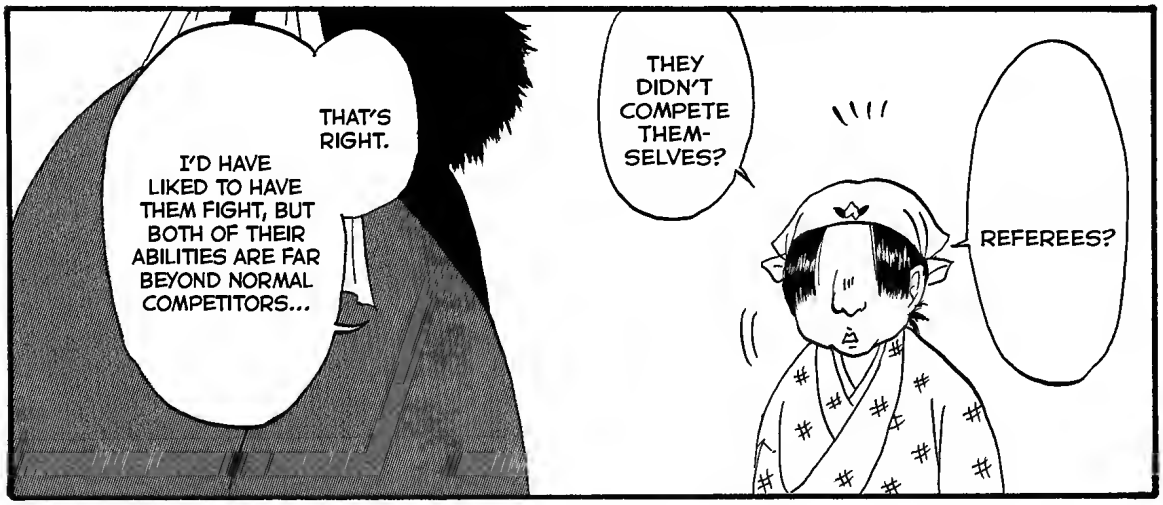
SPRING
THESE WALLS ARE MARBLE...

I THINK IT WAS ABOUT 1,000 YEARS AGO.
HMM...


LONG AGO WE HELD THE JAPAN-CHINA FRIENDSHIP GAMES. THINK OF IT LIKE THE OLYMPICS.
WAHH
WOO
COMMENTATOR
WOO

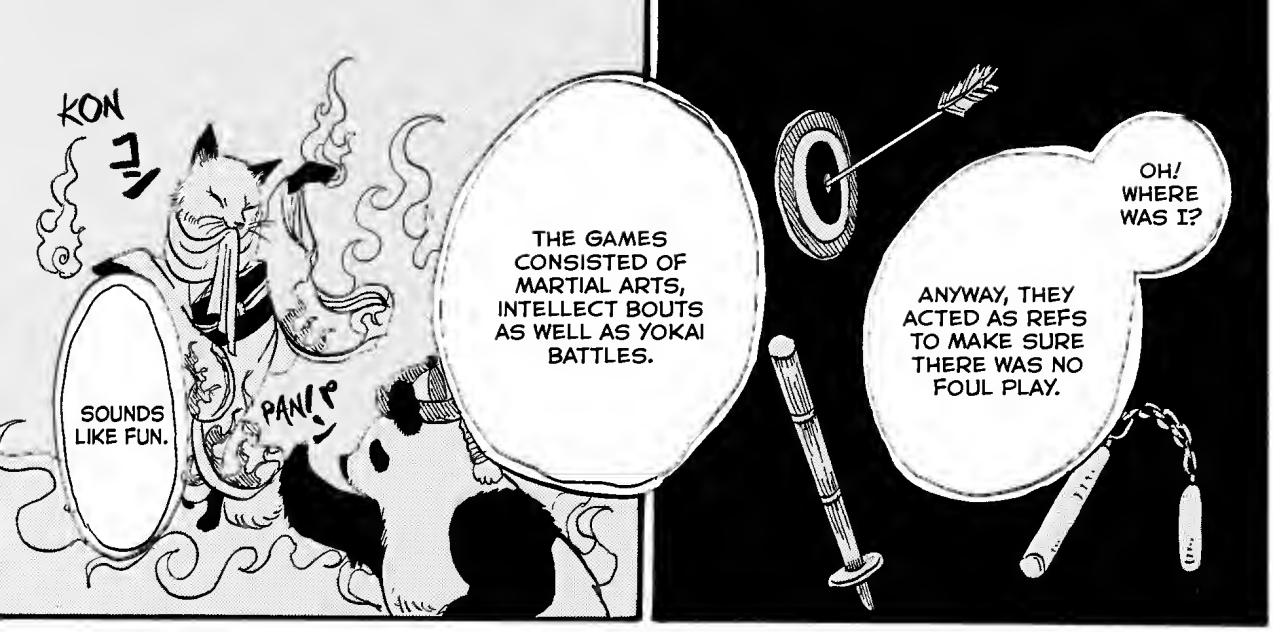
WHILE JAPAN WAS THE "REDDISH-BLACK TEAM".
CHINA WAS REPRESENTED AS THE "MILKY-WHITE TEAM".
UMM. EXCUSE ME, BUT WHY NOT JUST GO WITH WHITE TEAM AND BLACK TEAM?

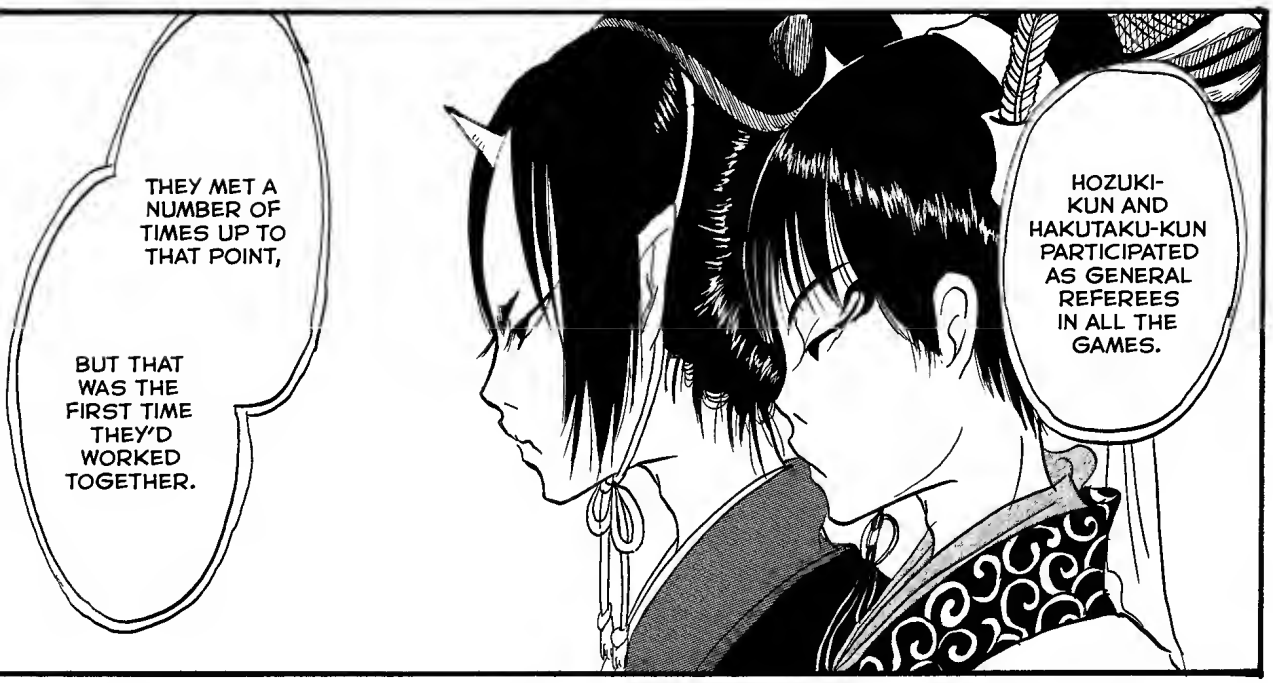
セイヤッ
Seyah!
トウッ
Duah!
THE TWO WERE REFEREES AT THE EVENT.

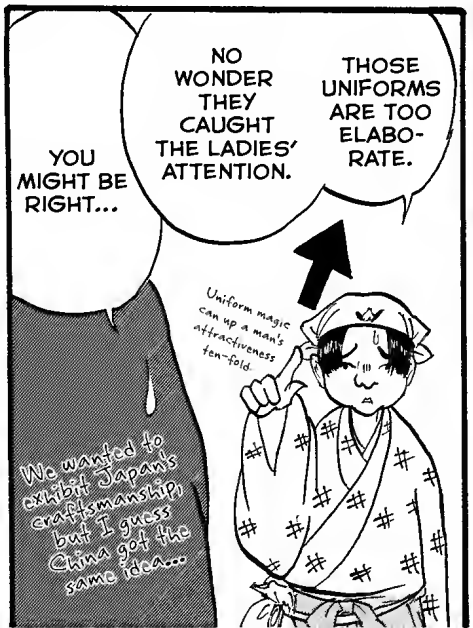

REFEREES?
THEY DIDN'T COMPETE THEM-SELVES?
THAT'S RIGHT.
I'D HAVE LIKED TO HAVE THEM FIGHT, BUT BOTH OF THEIR ABILITIES ARE FAR BEYOND NORMAL COMPETITORS...

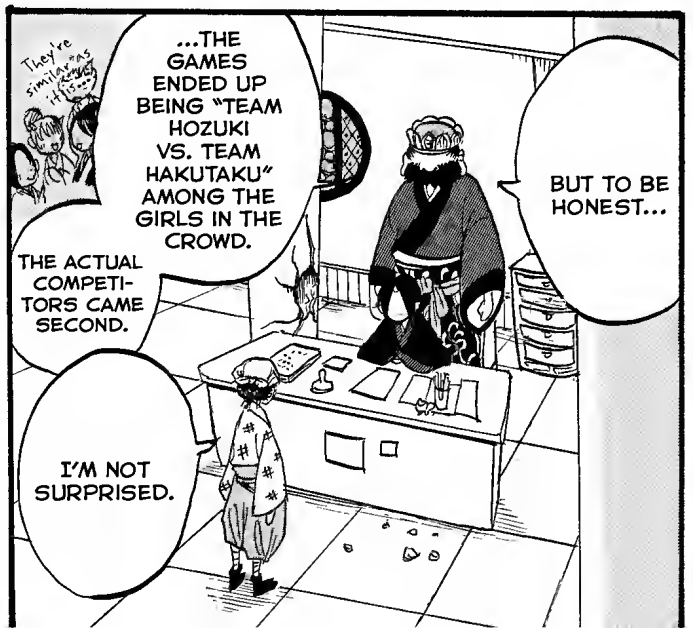
IF HE'S CHIEF, THEN WE'RE ALL DOOMED.
SHORT
Skill: Sneaks into people's houses, makes himself at home, then leaves.
NURARIHYON IS CONSIDERED THE CHIEF OF YOKAI IN JAPAN, BUT I HAVE MY SUSPICIONS ABOUT THAT, TOO...

HAKUTAKU-KUN MAY SEEM FLIPPANT,
BUT IN CHINA, HE'S SAID TO BE THE CHIEF OF ALL YOKAI.
He has a spot in Heaven since he's the divine beast of good omens.
REALLY?! I HAD NO IDEA...
へら
へら
WA HA HA

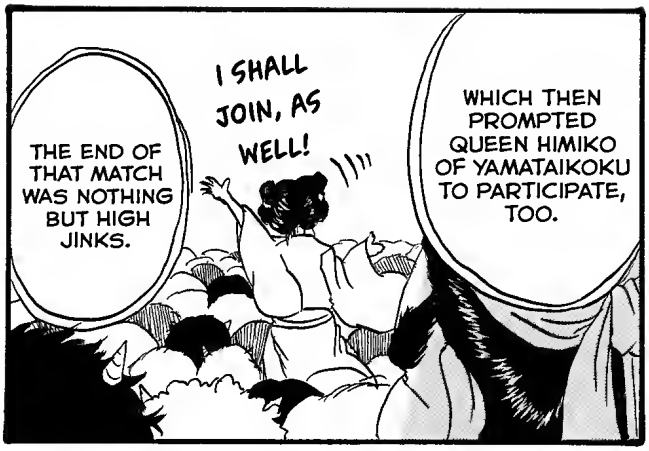

KON
コン
SOUNDS LIKE FUN.
PAN!?
パン
THE GAMES CONSISTED OF MARTIAL ARTS, INTELLECT BOUTS AS WELL AS YOKAI BATTLES.
ANYWAY, THEY ACTED AS REFS TO MAKE SURE THERE WAS NO FOUL PLAY.
OH! WHERE WAS I?


THEY MET A NUMBER OF TIMES UP TO THAT POINT,
BUT THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME THEY'D WORKED TOGETHER.
HOZUKI-KUN AND HAKUTAKU-KUN PARTICIPATED AS GENERAL REFEREES IN ALL THE GAMES.


YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT...
NO WONDER THEY CAUGHT THE LADIES' ATTENTION.
THOSE UNIFORMS ARE TOO ELABO-RATE.
Uniform magic can up a man's attractiveness ten-fold.
We wanted to exhibit Japan's craftsmanship, but I guess China got the same idea...

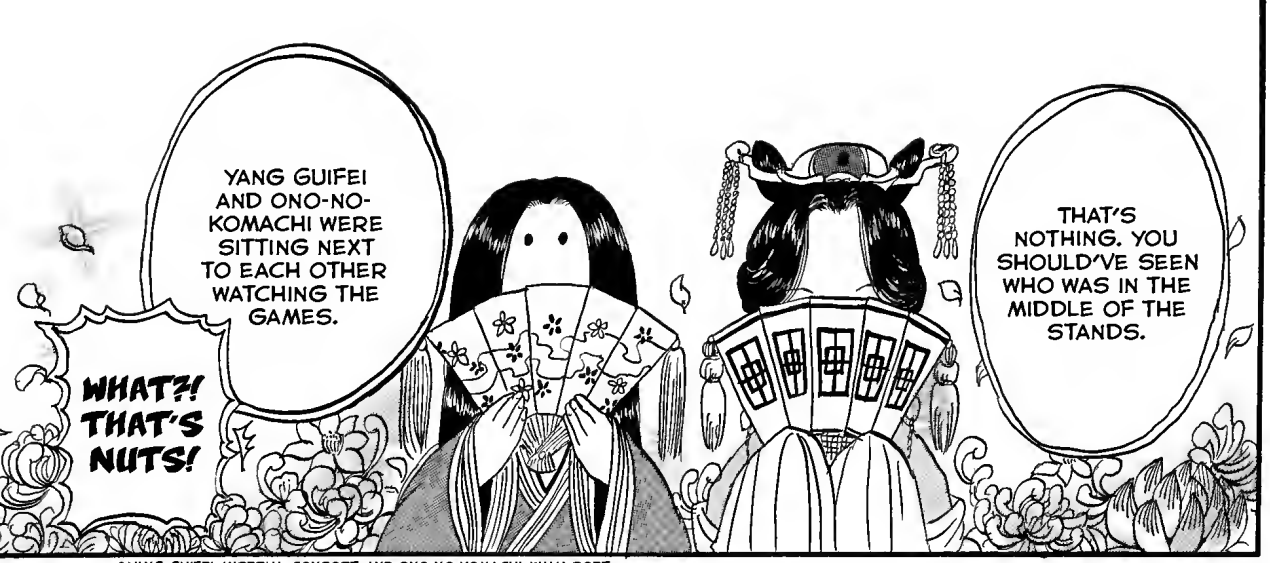

They've similar vibes, it's...
...THE GAMES ENDED UP BEING "TEAM HOZUKI VS. TEAM HAKUTAKU" AMONG THE GIRLS IN THE CROWD.
THE ACTUAL COMPETI-TORS CAME SECOND.
I'M NOT SURPRISED.
BUT TO BE HONEST...

ZHUGE LIANG
(DIED 234 A.D.)
VS.
PRINCE SHOTOKU
(DIED 622 A.D.)
IT WAS A GREAT SHOW.
THEIR KNOWLEDGE BATTLE HAD EVERYONE CAPTIVATED.
AH, BUT THERE WAS A BOUT THAT CAUGHT THE HEARTS OF BOTH COUNTRIES THAT YEAR.
SERIOUSLY?! I WISH I WAS THERE!
Stud

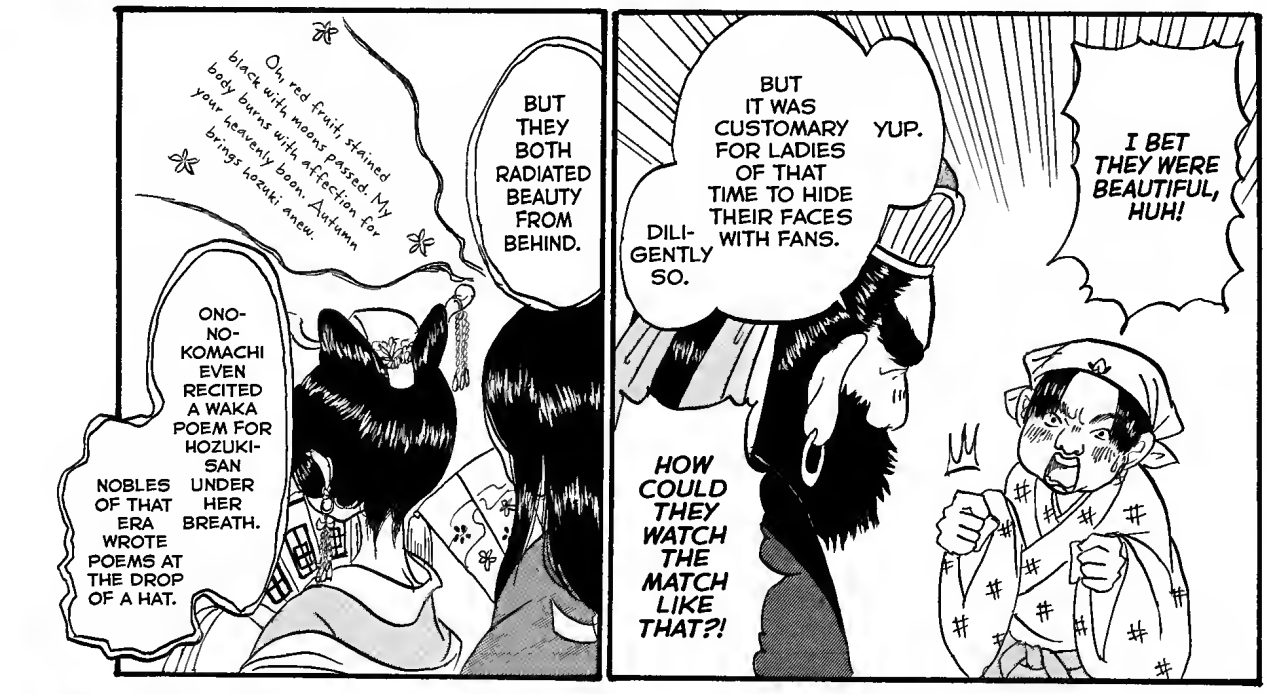

THE END OF THAT MATCH WAS NOTHING BUT HIGH JINKS.
I SHALL JOIN, AS WELL!
WHICH THEN PROMPTED QUEEN HIMIKO OF YAMATAIKOKU TO PARTICIPATE, TOO.

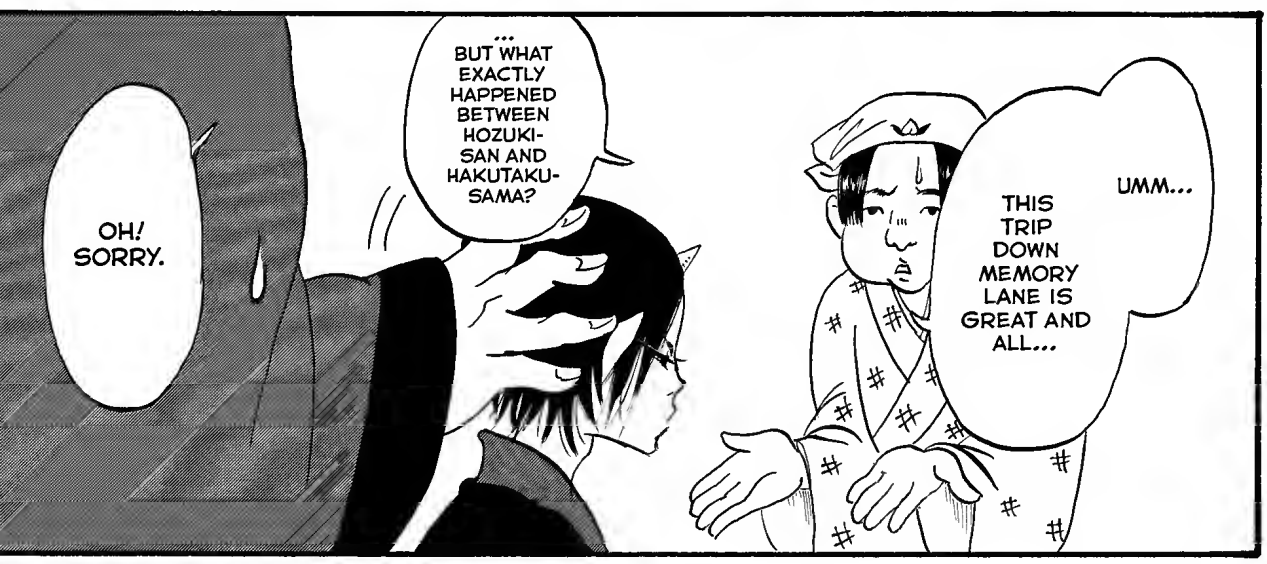
COUNT ME IN! I CAN'T STAND JUST WATCHING!
HALFWAY THROUGH THE BOUT THE MILITARY STRATEGIST, JIANG ZIYA, WHO WAS SITTING IN THE VIP BOOTH, JUMPED INTO THE MIX.
CLATTER
CLATTER

I DUNNO ABOUT THAT, BUT I REALLY WISH I COULD HAVE TAKEN PICTURE OF THAT SCRAMBLE!
FIDGET
わち
わち
わち
FIDGET
FIDGET
GREAT FIGURES ALL HAVE A FEW SCREWS LOOSE, I GUESS.


YANG GUIFEI AND ONO-NO-KOMACHI WERE SITTING NEXT TO EACH OTHER WATCHING THE GAMES.
WHAT?! THAT'S NUTS!
THAT'S NOTHING. YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN WHO WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STANDS.

* YANG GUIFEI, IMPERIAL CONSORT, AND ONO-NO-KOMACHI, WAKA POET, BOTH KNOWN FOR THEIR OTHERWORLDLY BEAUTY.


BUT THEY BOTH RADIATED BEAUTY FROM BEHIND.
Oh, red fruit stained black with moons passed. My body burns with affection for your heavenly boon. Autumn brings hozuki anew.
ONO-NO-KOMACHI EVEN RECITED A WAKA POEM FOR HOZUKI-SAN UNDER HER BREATH.
NOBLES OF THAT ERA WROTE POEMS AT THE DROP OF A HAT.
I BET THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL, HUH!
YUP.
BUT IT WAS CUSTOMARY FOR LADIES OF THAT TIME TO HIDE THEIR FACES WITH FANS.
DILI-GENTLY SO.
HOW COULD THEY WATCH THE MATCH LIKE THAT?!



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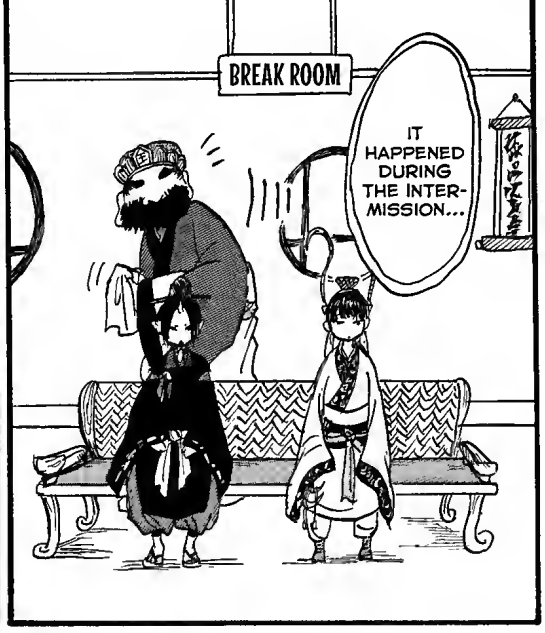
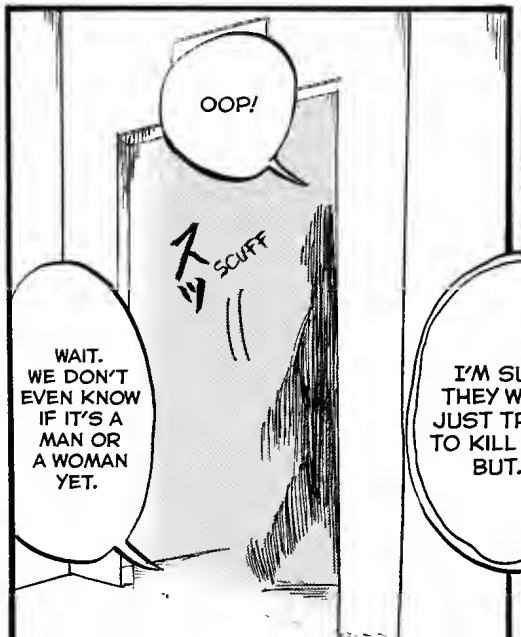

BREAK ROOM
IT HAPPENED DURING THE INTER-MISSION...

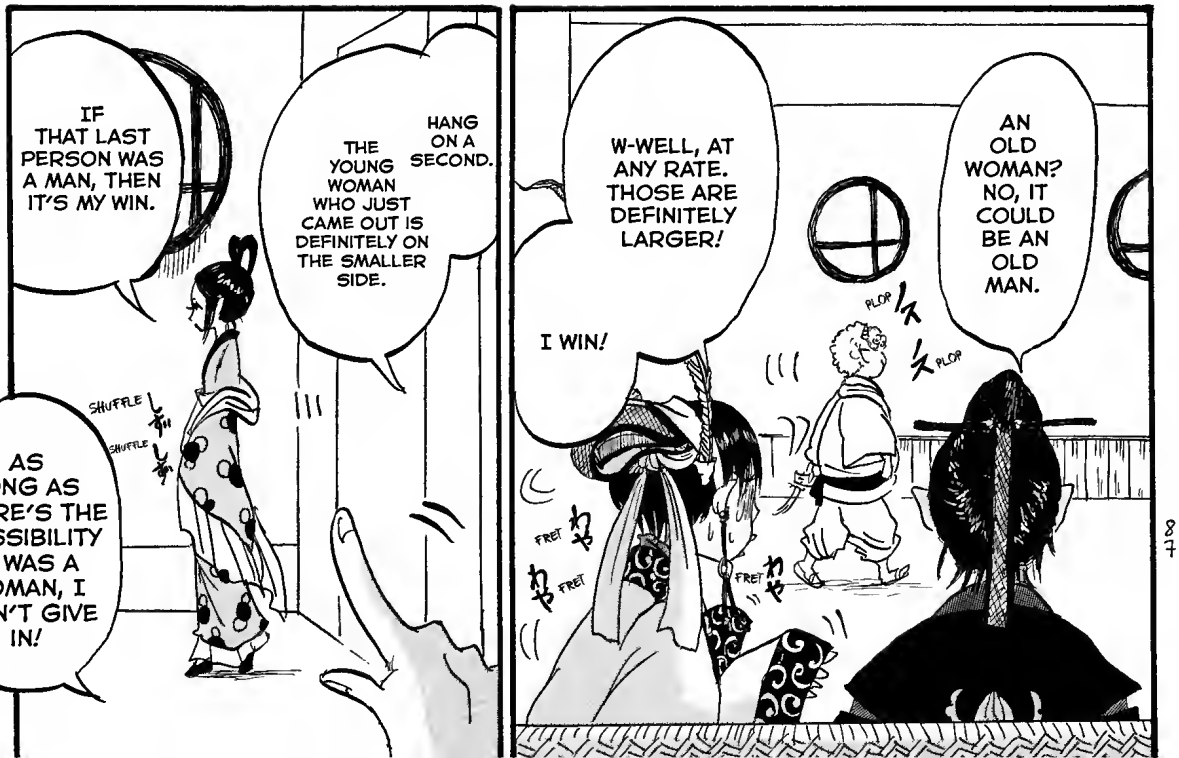
LET'S BET WHETHER THE NEXT LADY TO TURN THAT CORNER WILL HAVE BREASTS LARGER OR SMALLER THAN 85 CM.
THE LOSER MUST TREAT THE WINNER TO DINNER.
YOU SURE HAVE SOME RIDICULOUS IDEAS...
AS YOU WISH.
ABOUT 33.5 INCHES

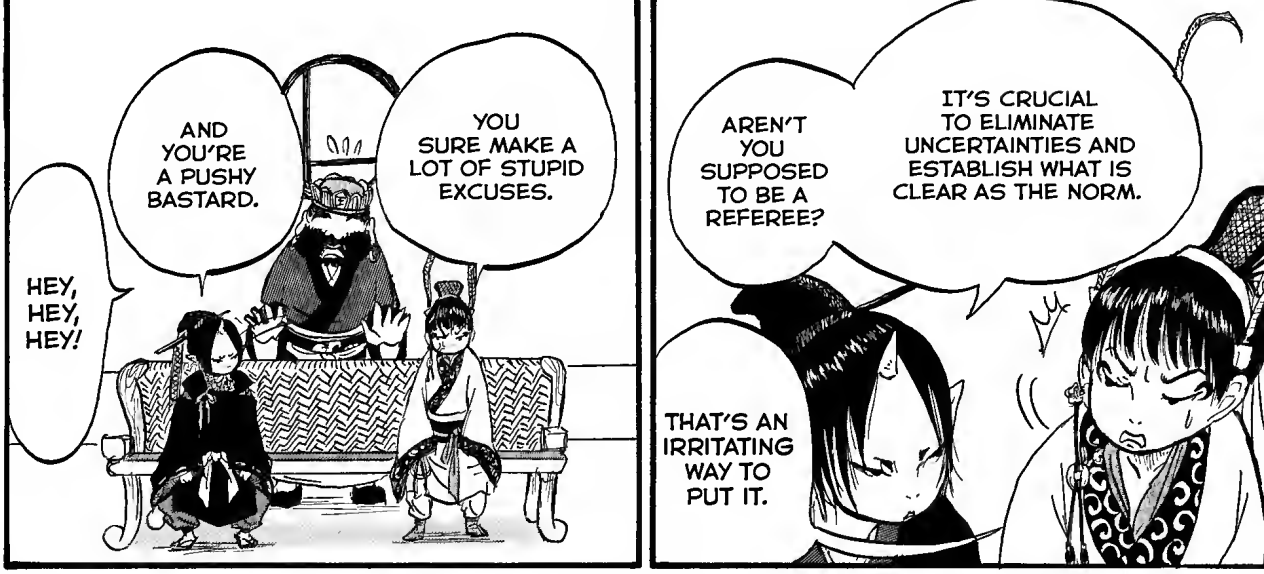
HAKUTAKU-KUN WAS THE ONE WHO FINALLY BROKE THE SILENCE.
CARE TO MAKE A WAGER?
WHAT SORT?
WHISH

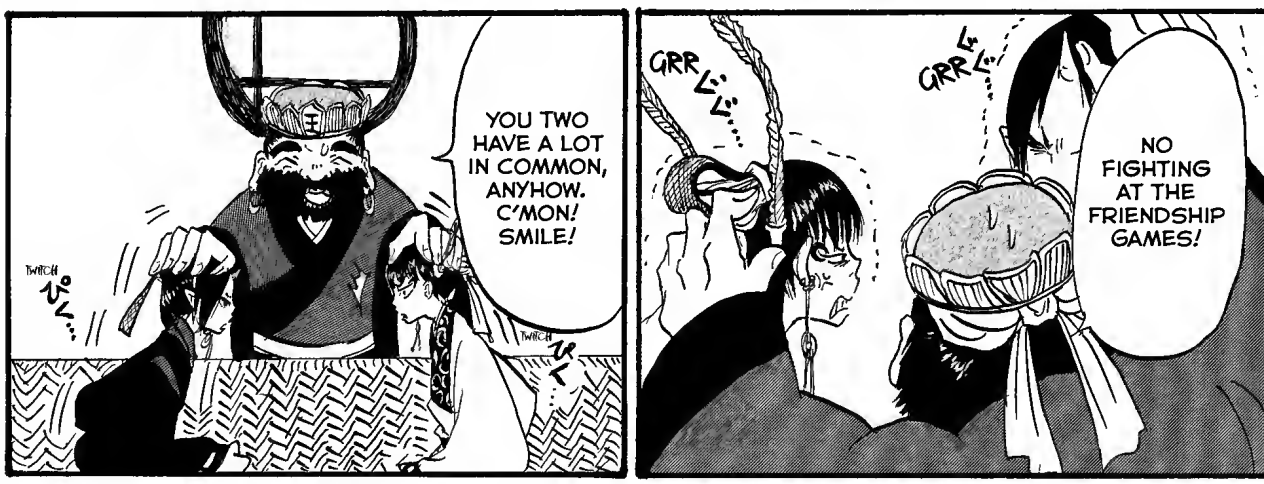

OOP!
SCUFF
WAIT. WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF IT'S A MAN OR A WOMAN YET.
I'M SURE THEY WERE JUST TRYING TO KILL TIME, BUT...

THEN I'LL TAKE SMALLER.
I BET ON LARGER.

Which is it?!
PHEW
DRIP
WATER
STAFF


IF THAT LAST PERSON WAS A MAN, THEN IT'S MY WIN.
HANG ON A SECOND. THE YOUNG WOMAN WHO JUST CAME OUT IS DEFINITELY ON THE SMALLER SIDE.
AS LONG AS THERE'S THE POSSIBILITY IT WAS A WOMAN, I WON'T GIVE IN!
SHUFFLE
SHUFFLE
W-WELL, AT ANY RATE. THOSE ARE DEFINITELY LARGER!
I WIN!
AN OLD WOMAN? NO, IT COULD BE AN OLD MAN.
PLOP
PLOP
FRET
FRET
FRET

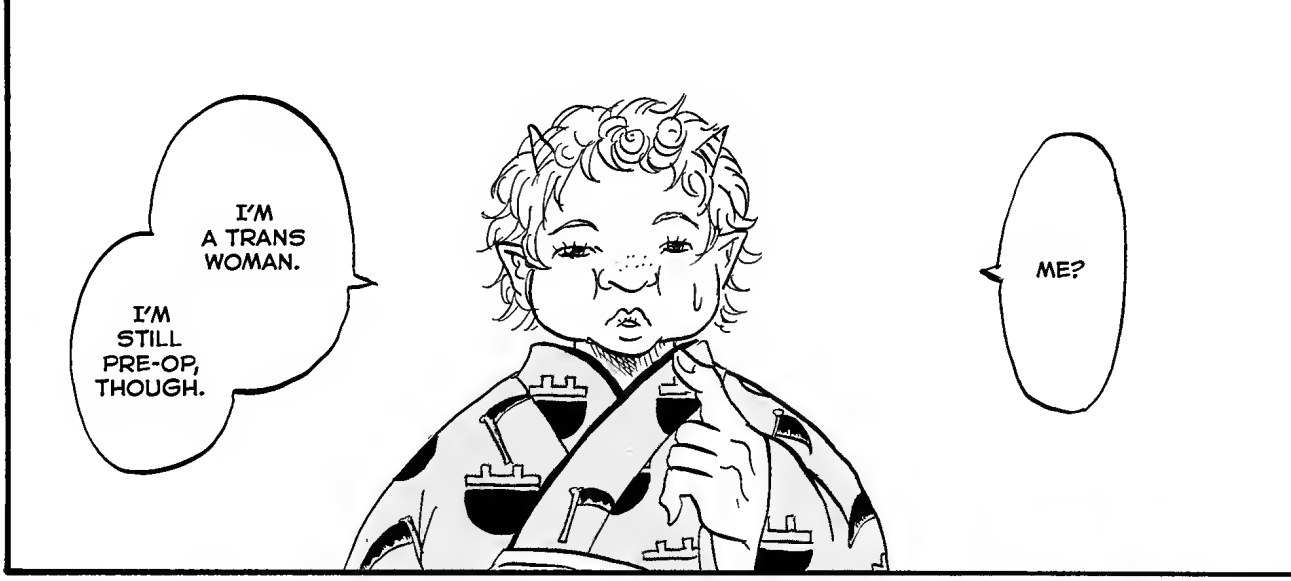

HEY, HEY, HEY!
AND YOU'RE A PUSHY BASTARD.
YOU SURE MAKE A LOT OF STUPID EXCUSES.
AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE A REFEREE?
IT'S CRUCIAL TO ELIMINATE UNCERTAINTIES AND ESTABLISH WHAT IS CLEAR AS THE NORM.
THAT'S AN IRRITATING WAY TO PUT IT.



* FAMOUS FIST OF THE NORTH STAR DEATH SOUND.

THAT'S PERFECT...
THAT'S HOW I GOT THIS SCAR.
Shock
I GUESS THEY WERE A BAD MATCH TO BEGIN WITH...
...AND THAT BET JUST SET THEM BOTH OFF.
WHAT A DUMB REASON.
I WASN'T MYSELF AT THE TIME.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I MADE SUCH A STUPID BET.
BUT I REFUSE TO GIVE IN.
THAT WAS MY WIN.
LET IT GO, WILL YOU?

UMM. WHY NOT CONFIRM ONCE AND FOR ALL?
IF THEY HAD A STAFF BADGE ON, THEN THEY MUST BE A JAPANESE DEMON, RIGHT?
I'M SURE YOU COULD TRACK THEM DOWN WITH SOME EFFORT.
OH, YEAH.
THAT'S TRUE.
I SHOULD HAVE A RECORD OF WHO WORKED THAT DAY.
IT MIGHT BE RUDE TO THAT PERSON, BUT USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE UP.
A few hours laterrrrrrrr.

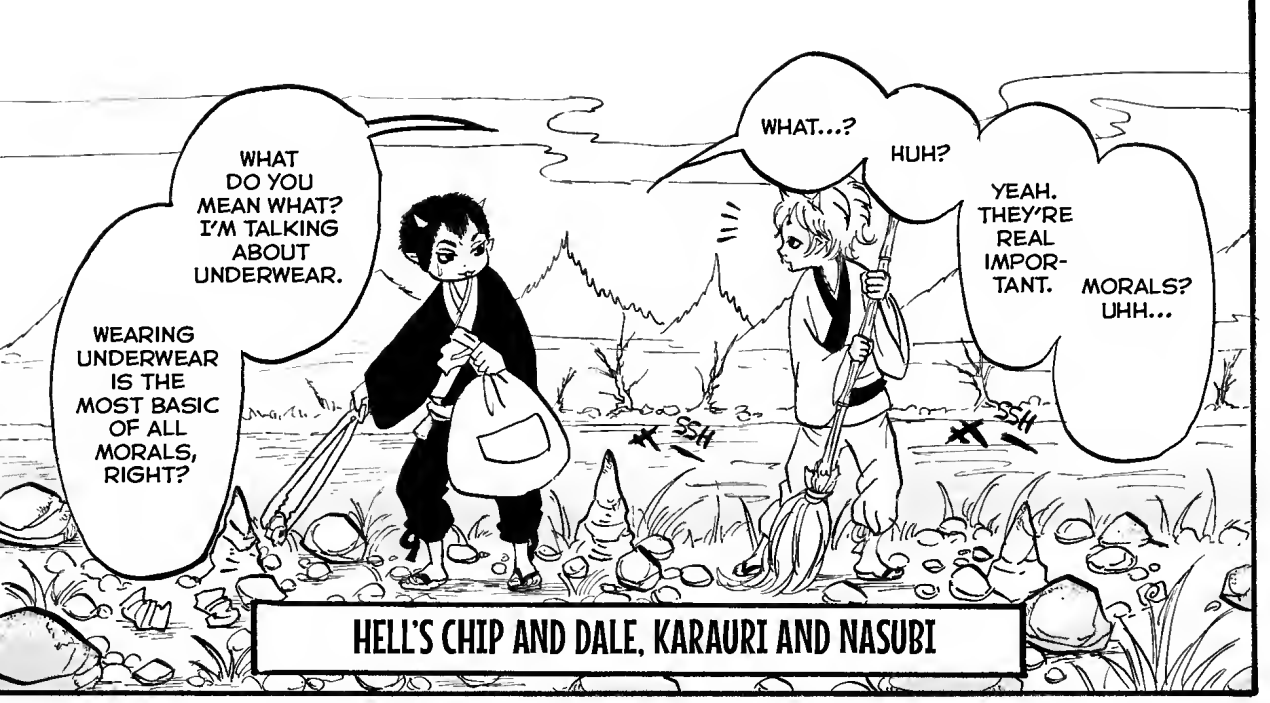


NOT A CHANCE! IF HER HEART IS THAT OF A WOMAN, THEN SHE'S A WOMAN!
GAHHH
IF HE HAS THE BODY OF A MAN, THEN HIS BREASTS OF THOSE OF A MAN, TOO!
UMM. I THINK I'LL HEAD BACK NOW.
OKAY

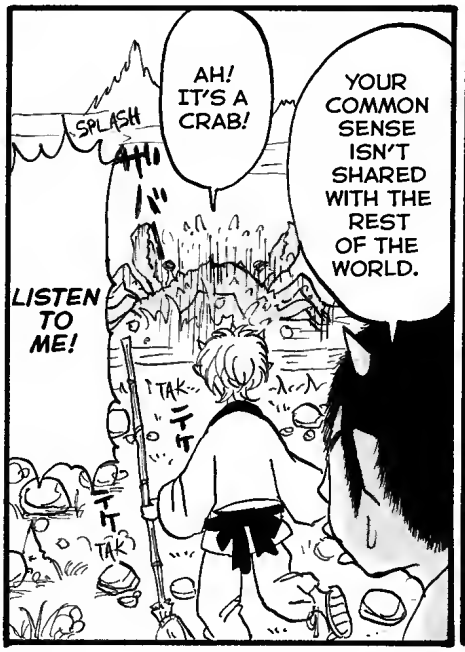
CHAPTER FIVE - END

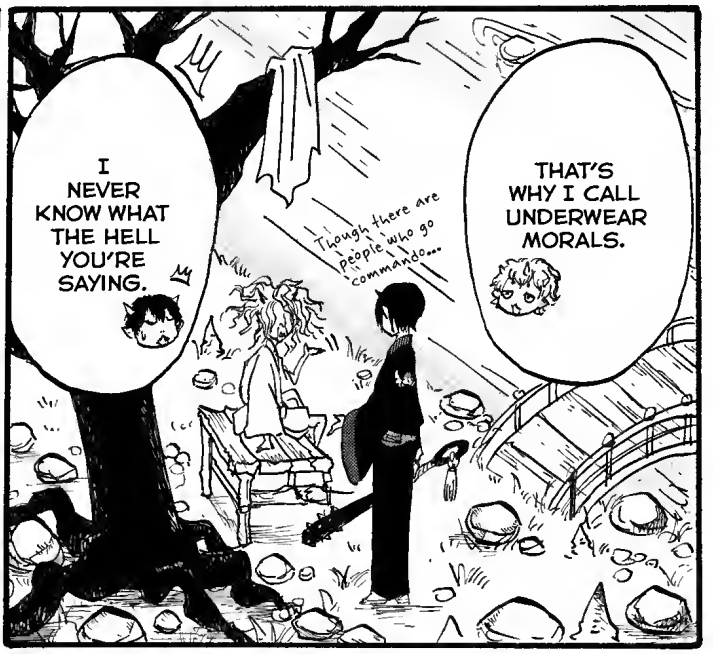
THE OGRE'S TRUNKS
REALLY ARE NICE TRUNKS
HMM?
HEY, KARAURI.
...
THEY'RE SUPER STRONG! THEY'RE MADE OF TIGER'S HIDE
SUPER STRONG!
THEY'RE SUPER STR-ONG!
MORALS SURE ARE IMPORTANT, HUH?

# CHAPTER 6
## OGRES, UNDERWEAR, AND CRABS

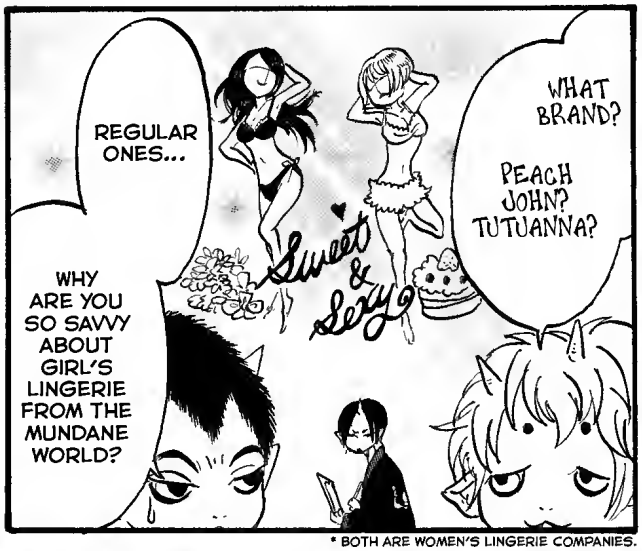


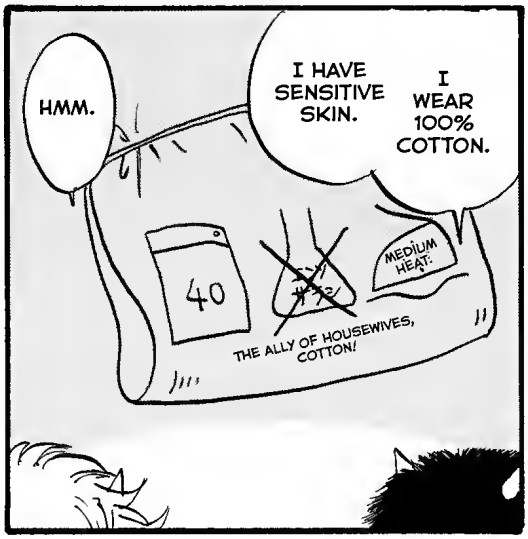

## HELL'S CHIP AND DALE, KARAURI AND NASUBI



NOTHING REALLY. I JUST REMEMBERED HOW IMPORTANT UNDERWEAR IS.
HUH?
AND? WHAT ABOUT
PLEASE DON'T SAY EVERY LITTLE THING THAT COMES TO MIND. YOU'LL CONFUSE THE HELL OUT OF ME.



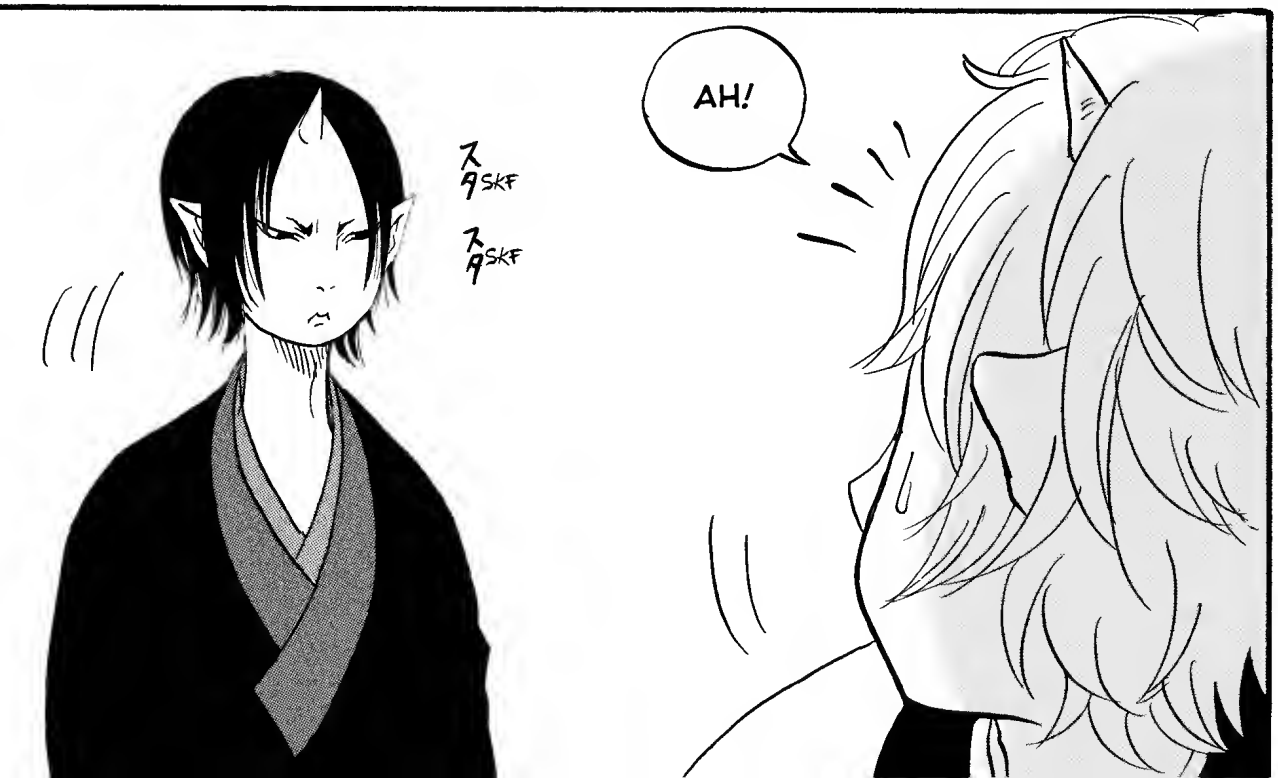

* BOTH ARE WOMEN'S LINGERIE COMPANIES.

MY SISTER BUYS THOSE BRANDS AND HAS THEM DELIVERED TO THE HOUSE WHENEVER SHE COMES HOME.
Ah, shut up.
You shop online too much, sis!
WHY DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THEM?

THERE WAS A SPECIAL ABOUT IT IN THIS MAGAZINE.
WEEKLY SANZU
CAT COLLECTION
AN INTERVIEW WITH LORD ENMA!
LINGERIE MAKER SCOOP! DESIGNER'S FIXATIONS!
LET'S LEARN FROM THE HANDSOME YOSHITSUNE!
UPSTANDING GENTLEMAN READERS WON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
THEY SHOULDN'T, ANYWAY.

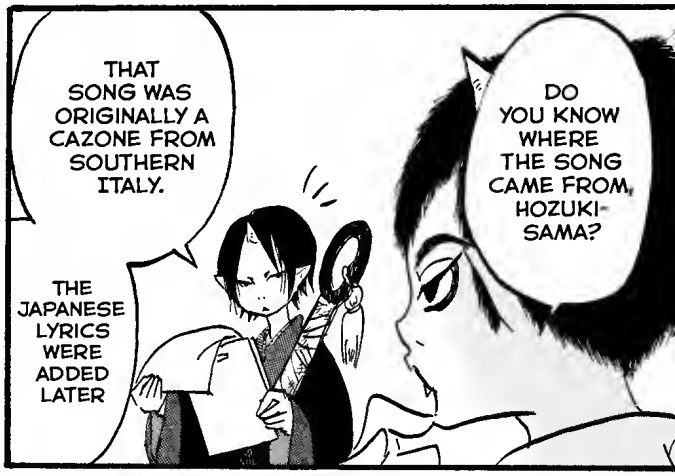
...
THE OGRE'S TRUNKS!
PUT 'EM ON!
PUT 'EM ON!
SWISH
SWISH

I DON'T GET THE POINT OF IT.
WHAT'S WITH THAT SONG, ANYWAY?
The ogre's trunks are good trunks!
Act now and get 5% off!
カチ CLACK
カチ CLACK
HUH? ISN'T IT A PROMOTIONAL SONG FOR THE COMPANY THAT MAKES OGRE TRUNKS?
I'M AFRAID NOT.

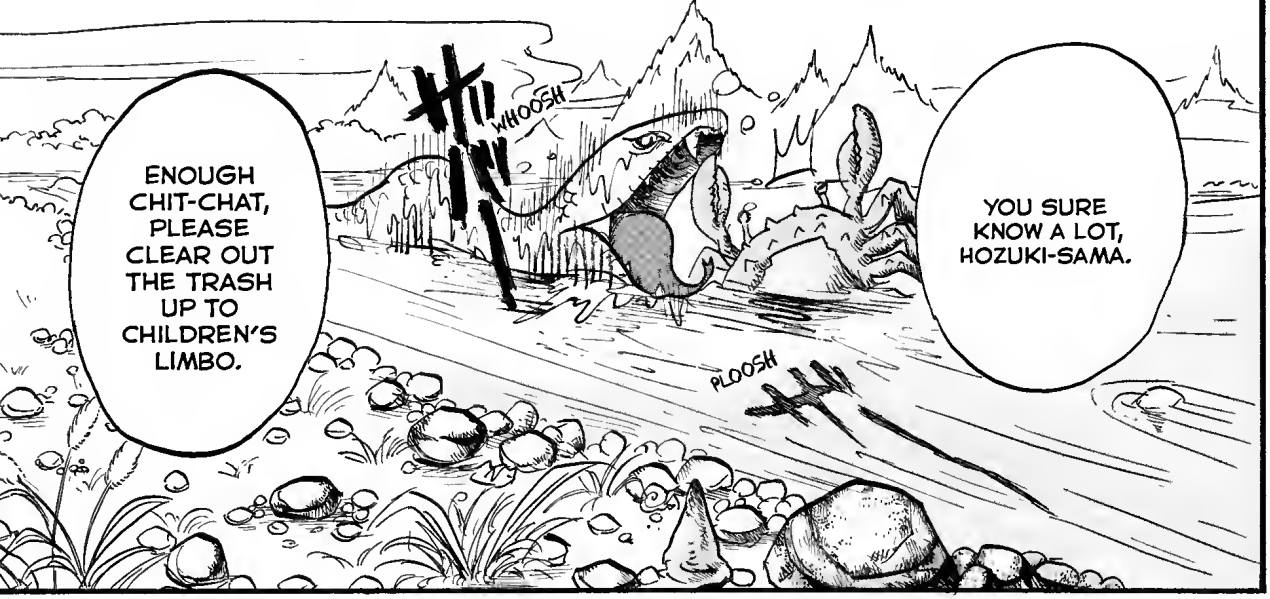

AH!
スタSKF
スタSKF

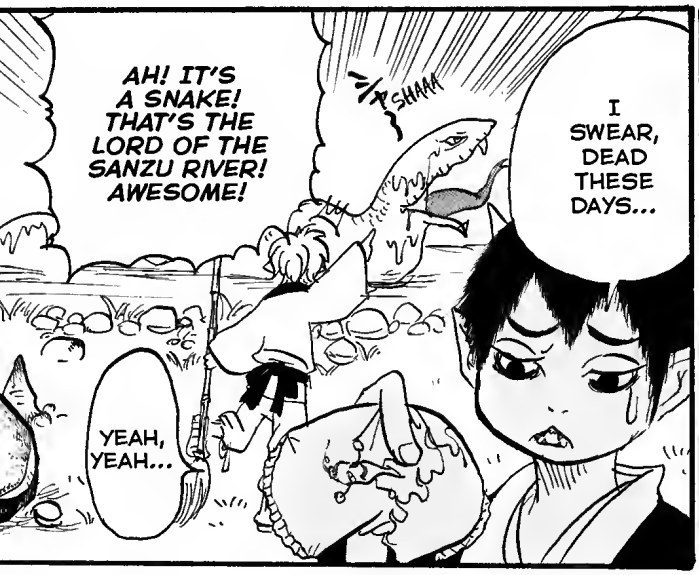
WHOOSH
WHOOSH
SORRY.
I WAS LISTENING IN OUT OF CURIOSITY, BUT...
PLEASE CUT THE CHATTER AND GET BACK TO WORK.

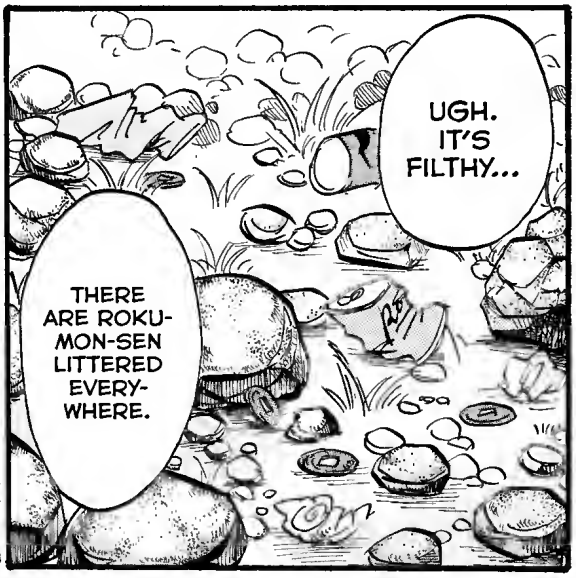
HUH. SO IT'S NOT A HELL ORIGINAL, AFTER ALL.
Grazie!
Apparently it was made to promote a mountain cable car.
THE WORDS FUNICULI FUNICULA ARE MEANT TO STIR ENTHUSIASM.


THAT SONG WAS ORIGINALLY A CAZONE FROM SOUTHERN ITALY.
THE JAPANESE LYRICS WERE ADDED LATER
DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE SONG CAME FROM, HOZUKI-SAMA?

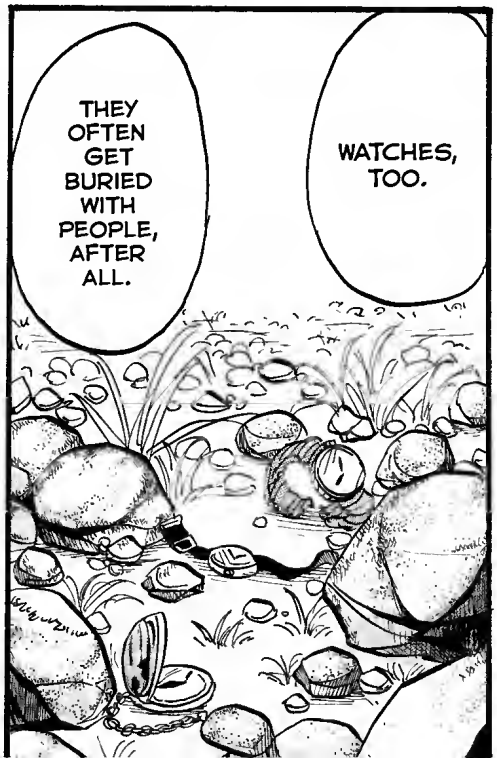
OHH!
I'VE HEARD OF THAT!
Funiculi funicula!
Funiculi funicula!
THE TITLE IS FUNICULI FUNICULA.



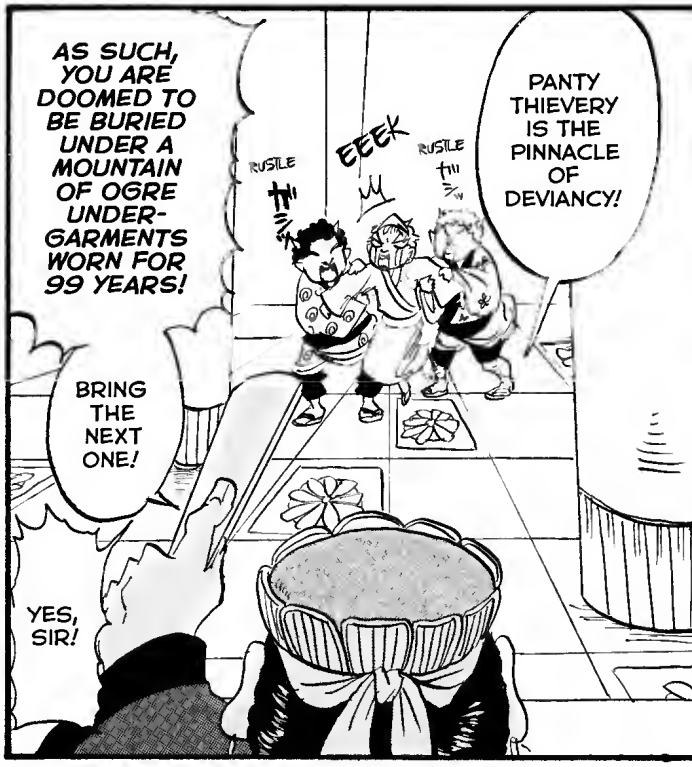



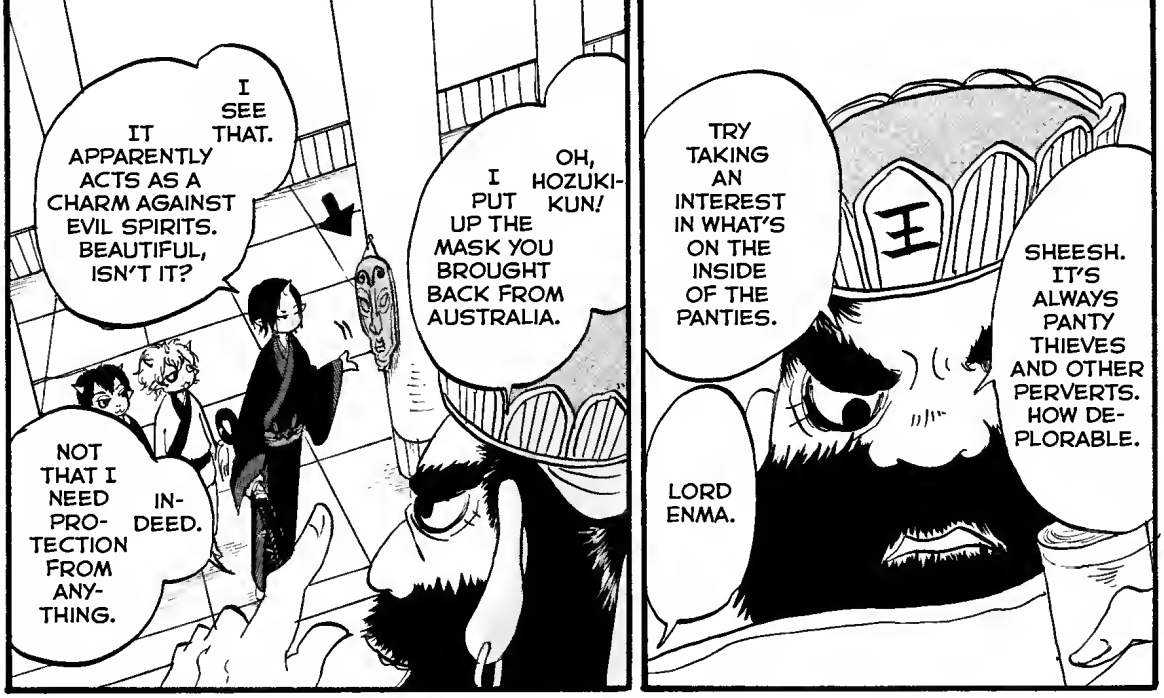

* CURRENCY USED FOR PASSAGE DOWN THE SANZU RIVER.



I HEREBY CONDEMN YOU TO...
CRUSHING HELL!
FWAP

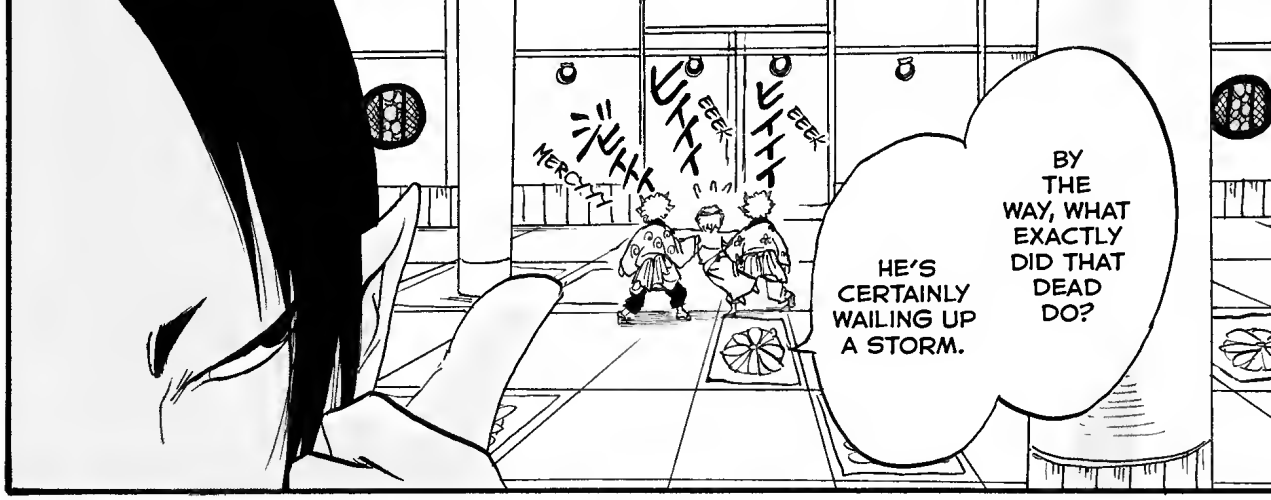
THERE IS NO MERCY IN HELL!
PLEASE HAVE MERCY ON MY SOUL!
REALLY?
BY THE WAY, THEY'RE MY UNDERWEAR.

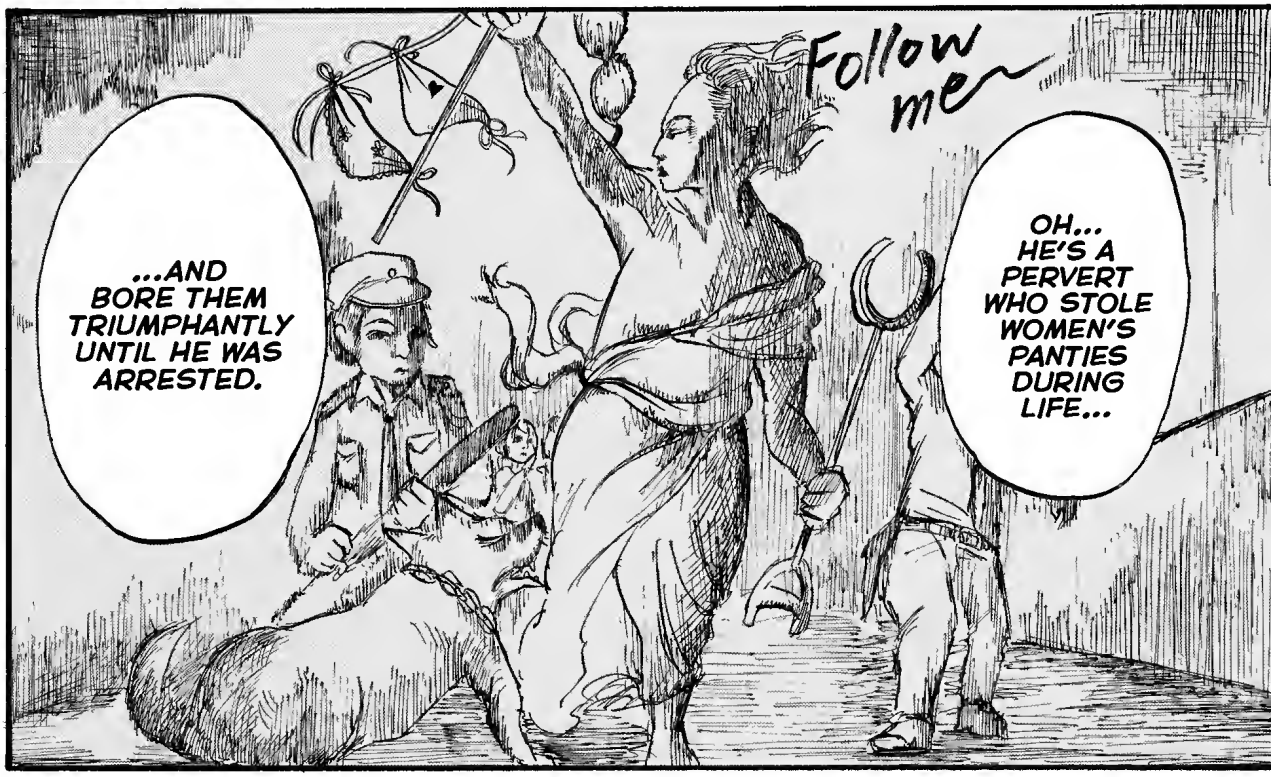

AS SUCH, YOU ARE DOOMED TO BE BURIED UNDER A MOUNTAIN OF OGRE UNDER-GARMENTS WORN FOR 99 YEARS!
PANTY THIEVERY IS THE PINNACLE OF DEVIANCY!
RUSTLE
EEEK
RUSTLE
BRING THE NEXT ONE!
YES, SIR!

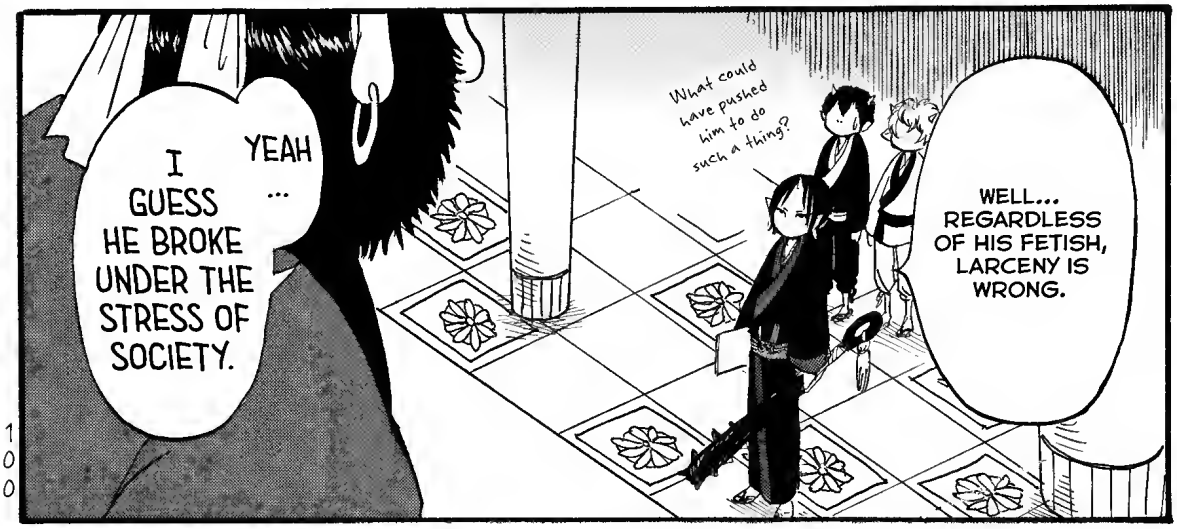

OH, HOZUKI-KUN! I PUT UP THE MASK YOU BROUGHT BACK FROM AUSTRALIA.
I SEE THAT. IT APPARENTLY ACTS AS A CHARM AGAINST EVIL SPIRITS. BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T IT?
NOT THAT I NEED PRO-TECTION FROM ANY-THING. IN-DEED.
LORD ENMA.
TRY TAKING AN INTEREST IN WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE OF THE PANTIES.
SHEESH. IT'S ALWAYS PANTY THIEVES AND OTHER PERVERTS. HOW DE-PLORABLE.

WE FINISHED PICKING UP THE TRASH!
GOOD WORK.
EVERYTHING CHECKS OUT AT THE SANZU RIVER.

OH, BUT THE OLD HAG DID TRY TO SHAKE US DOWN.
Tch! Hand over the coins.
HUH ...?
SHE'S A GREEDY OLD GAL, THAT'S FOR SURE.
Money's not the only thing to life, handsome. SLIDE
BUT HER ATTITUDE IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DEPENDING ON WHO SHE'S TALK-ING TO.
YEAH...
OLD HAG OF HELL: A SCARY OLD LADY WHOSE JOB IS TO RIP THE CLOTHES OFF OF THE DEAD PASSING DOWN THE SANZU RIVER.

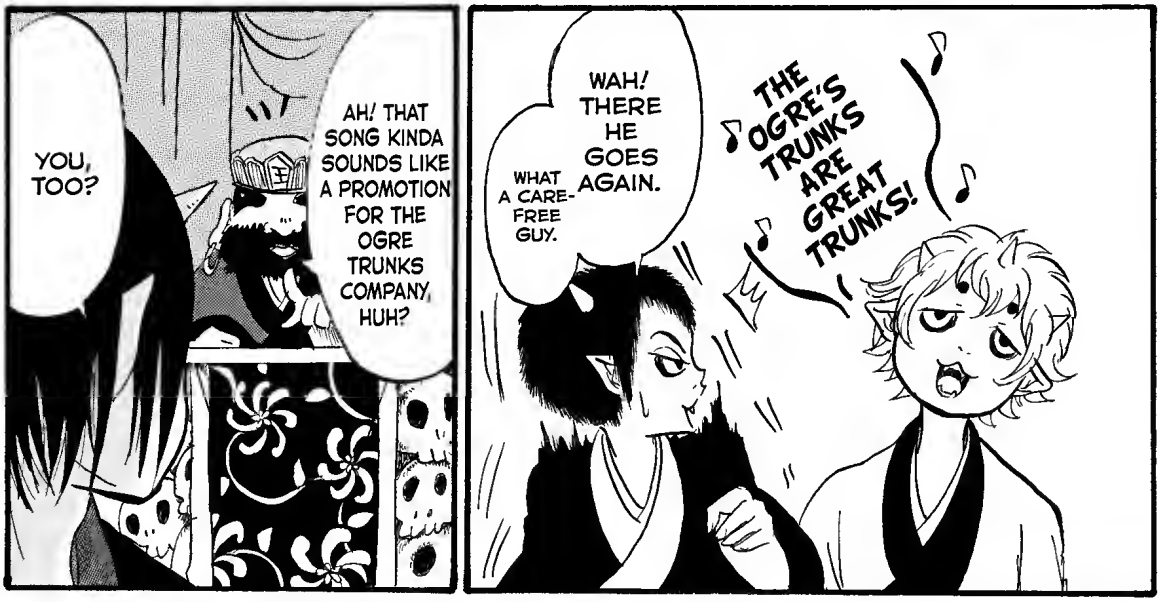

BY THE WAY, WHAT EXACTLY DID THAT DEAD DO?
HE'S CERTAINLY WAILING UP A STORM.
EEEK
EEEK
MERCY!!


Follow me~
OH... HE'S A PERVERT WHO STOLE WOMEN'S PANTIES DURING LIFE...
...AND BORE THEM TRIUMPHANTLY UNTIL HE WAS ARRESTED.


WELL... REGARDLESS OF HIS FETISH, LARCENY IS WRONG.
What could have pushed him to do such a thing?
YEAH ... I GUESS HE BROKE UNDER THE STRESS OF SOCIETY.

WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO TRANSLATE?
WE WERE TALKING ABOUT UNDERWEAR. THE KIND PEOPLE WEAR INSTEAD OF FUNDOSHI THESE DAYS.
PANTS
YOU MEAN LIKE PANTS?
TROUSERS?
TROUSERS SEEM TO BE A COMMON THEME TODAY.

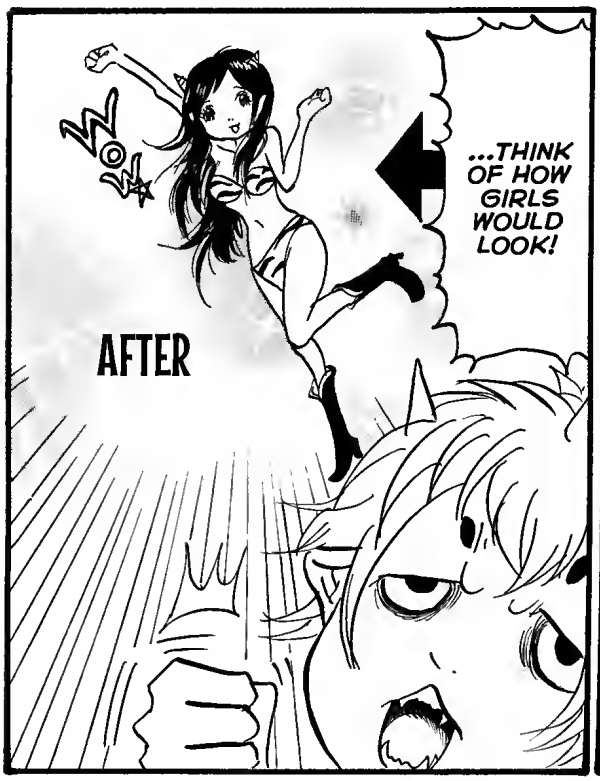
* FUNDOSHI: A TYPE OF TRADITIONAL JAPANESE UNDERGARMENT.

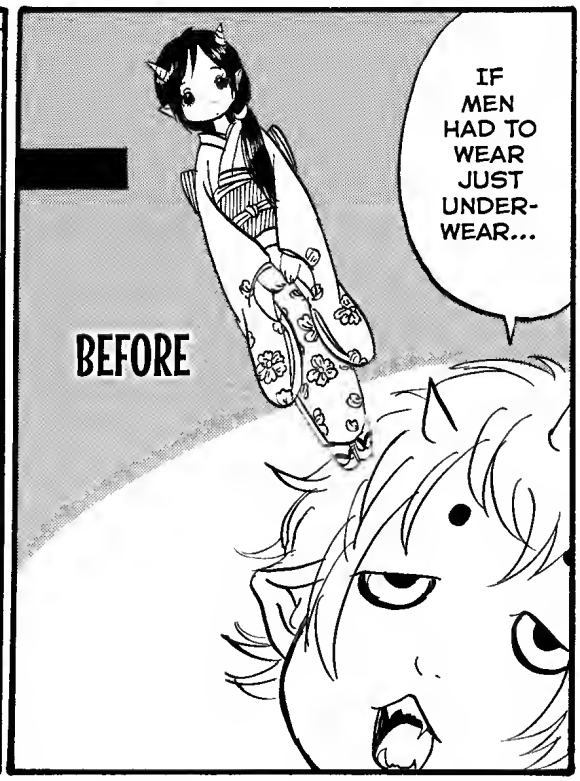

YOU, TOO?
AH! THAT SONG KINDA SOUNDS LIKE A PROMOTION FOR THE OGRE TRUNKS COMPANY, HUH?
WAH! THERE HE GOES AGAIN.
WHAT A CARE-FREE GUY.
♪ THE OGRE'S TRUNKS ARE GREAT TRUNKS! ♪

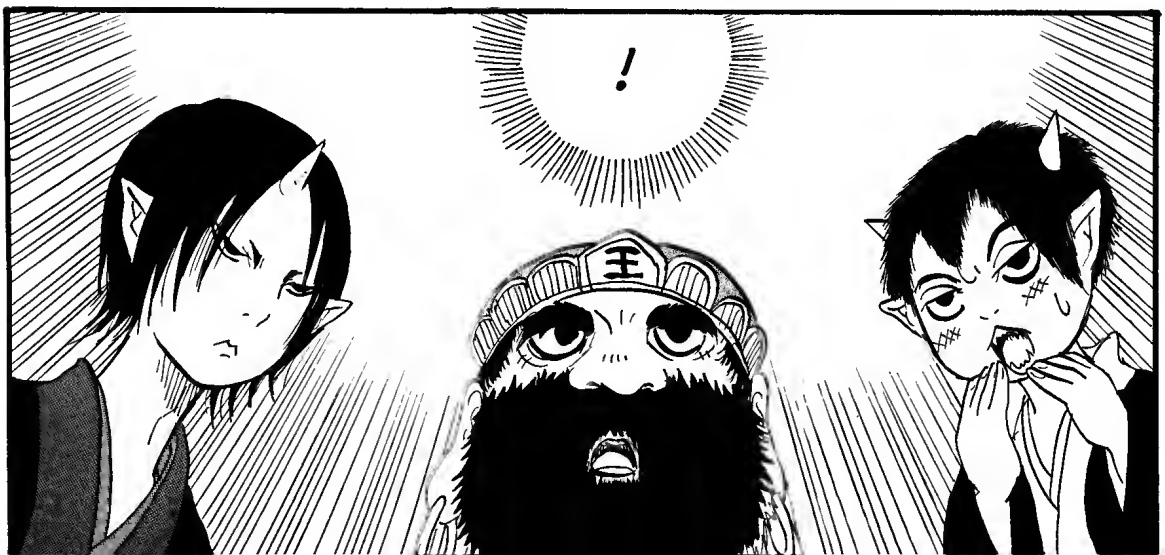
UNDERWEAR USED TO BE MADE OF TIGER HIDE, BUT CLOTHING ITSELF VARIED.
PEOPLE IN THE MUNDANE WORLD HAVE THIS IDEA THAT ALL OGRES WEAR TRUNKS MADE OF TIGER HIDE.

I MEAN, THINK ABOUT IT.
HUH? NO WAY! THAT'S SUPER LAME.

GA HA HA HA
HMM. BUT I THINK WEARING JUST TIGER TRUNKS IS NICE.

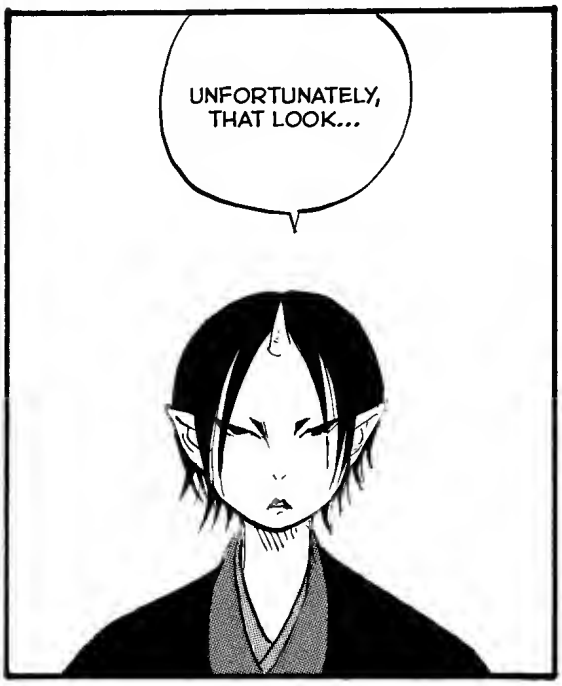

AFTER
...THINK OF HOW GIRLS WOULD LOOK!

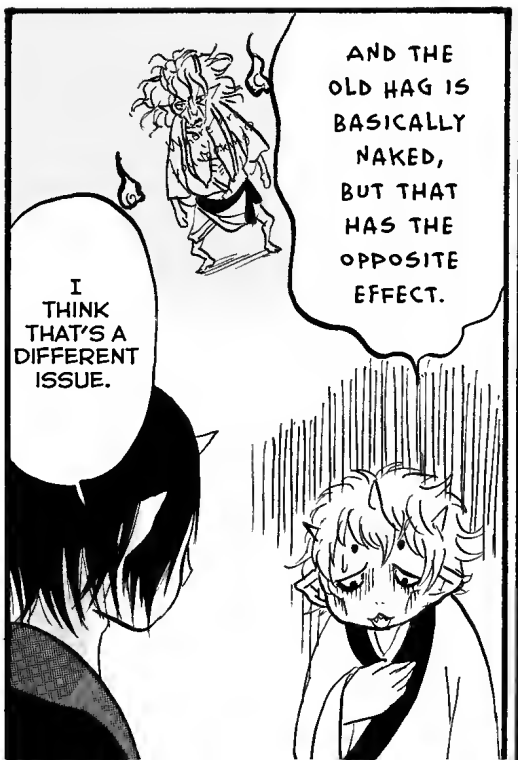

BEFORE
IF MEN HAD TO WEAR JUST UNDER-WEAR...


!

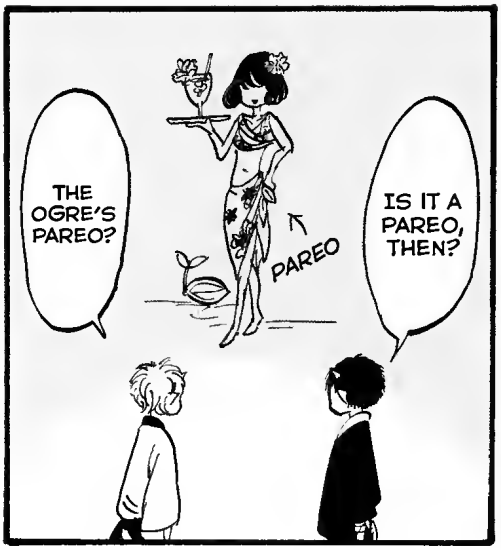
Darling, I won't forgive cheating!
CRACKLE
SNAP
SHE ISN'T A DEMON, ANYWAY.
... IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

THAT SURE SOUNDS GLAMOROUS.
OH, MAN...


UNFORTUNATELY, THAT LOOK...


AND THE OLD HAG IS BASICALLY NAKED, BUT THAT HAS THE OPPOSITE EFFECT.
I THINK THAT'S A DIFFERENT ISSUE.

I GUESS THAT'S TRUE...
NOT TO MENTION YOU'D GET BORED OF SEEING THAT BEFORE LONG.
Like how the change from summer to fall fashion is refreshing.

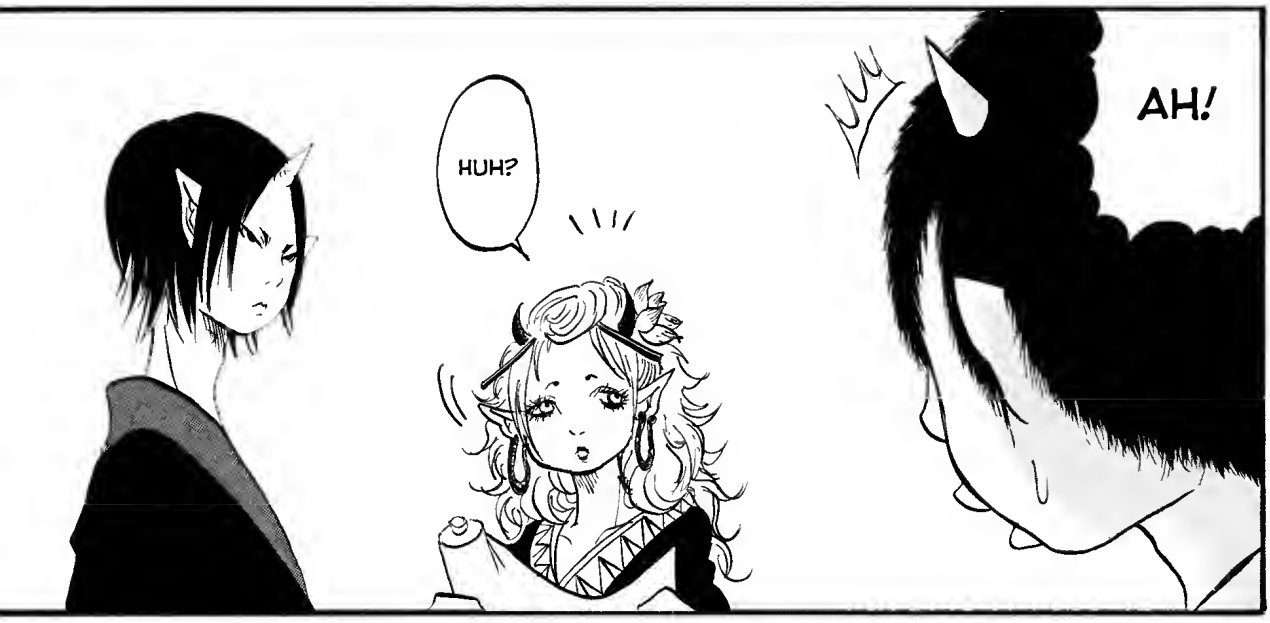

THE OGRE'S PAREO?
PAREO
IS IT A PAREO, THEN?

THEY'RE MORE LIKE A LOIN CLOTH, HUH.
CAN THOSE REALLY BE CALLED UNDERWEAR IN THE FIRST PLACE?

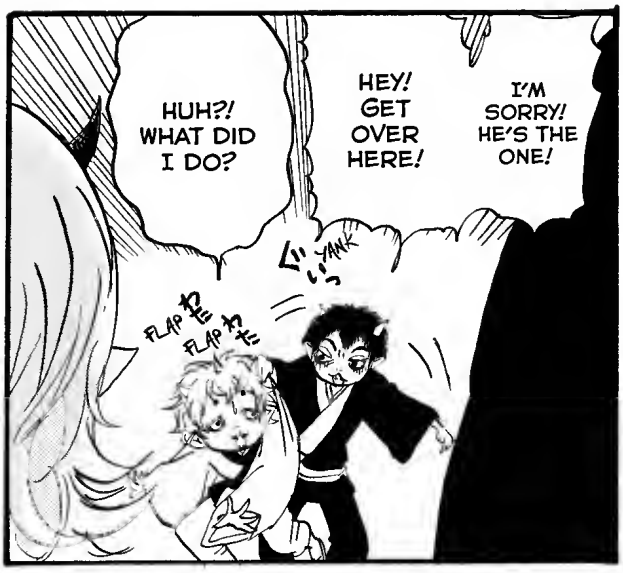
HOZUKI-SAMAAA!
THAT MAKES IT SOUND KINDA MOODY.
THEN THE SONG WOULD BE, "THE OGRE'S PAREO IS A NICE PAREO"?

WHO TOOK INVENTORY, I WONDER?
THAT'S STRANGE.

THE NUMBER OF WEAPONS IN STORAGE DON'T MATCH THE RECORDS.
FLAP
バサッ
YES? HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

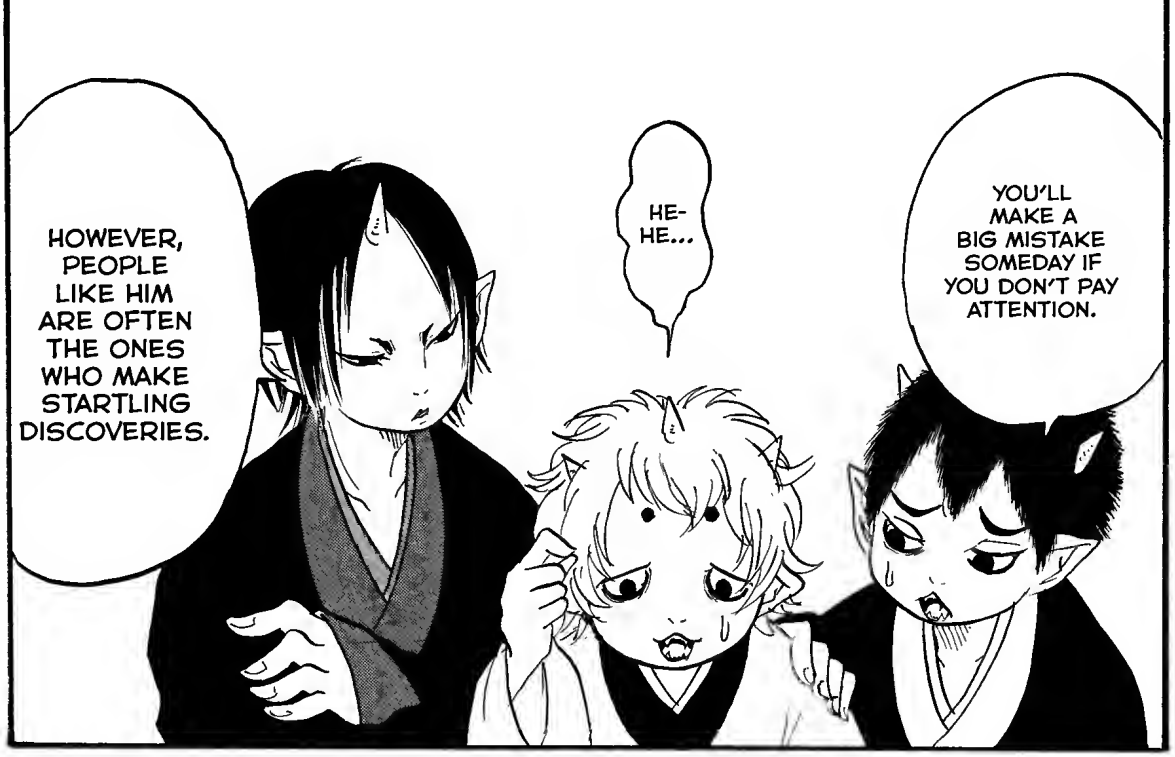

AH!
HUH?

YES, MA'AM! WE'LL FIX IT RIGHT AWAY!
OH! YOU'RE THE NEW RECRUIT, AREN'T YOU?
BOW


HUH?! WHAT DID I DO?
HEY! GET OVER HERE!
I'M SORRY! HE'S THE ONE!
YANK
FLAP FLAP

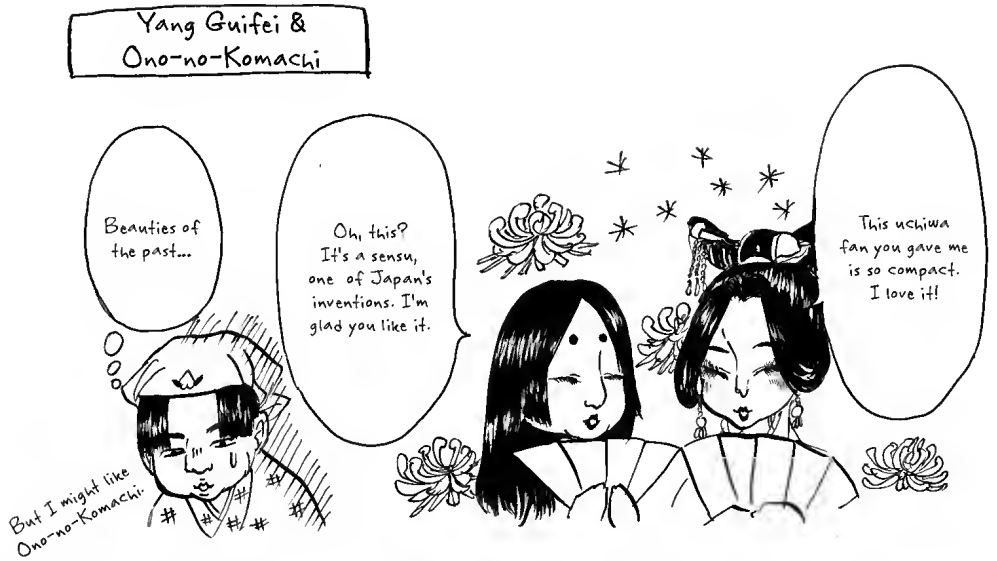
WELL, GOOD THING IT WAS JUST A SMALL MISTAKE.
UGH... SORRY...
HOW CARELESS CAN YOU BE?! YOU REALLY HAVE TO WORK ON YOUR CONCEN-TRATION.

YES, MA'AM!
I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU.
JUST BE CAREFUL FROM NOW ON.


HOWEVER, PEOPLE LIKE HIM ARE OFTEN THE ONES WHO MAKE STARTLING DISCOVERIES.
HE-HE...
YOU'LL MAKE A BIG MISTAKE SOMEDAY IF YOU DON'T PAY ATTENTION.

Earlier today,
AH! I SAW THAT! THE CRAB DID IT!
?!
the Sanzu river's lord was rushed to the ER after sustaining a throat injury around five pm.
The Crow-Tengu police are currently investigating the cause and ask any witnesses to come forward...
!

CHAPTER SIX - END


Yang Guifei & Ono-no-Komachi
Beauties of the past...
But I might like Ono-no-Komachi.
Oh, this? It's a sensu, one of Japan's inventions. I'm glad you like it.
This uchiwa fan you gave me is so compact. I love it!

I got a lot of bunk from family and friends about this. Apparently it would have been odd for ladies of that time to hold sensu folding fans. Sorry... Please assume the above was the case.

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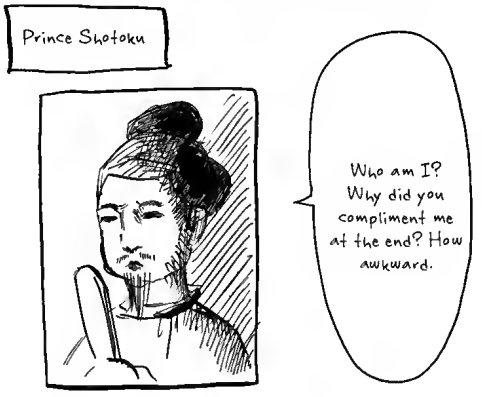


This is the portrait we think to be Prince Shotoku. Recently there have been theories that claim otherwise, but I wonder what the case really is. I had a chance to see the original painting at a museum before. It was even larger and more beautiful than I imagined. He looked more prim and proper than I expected.

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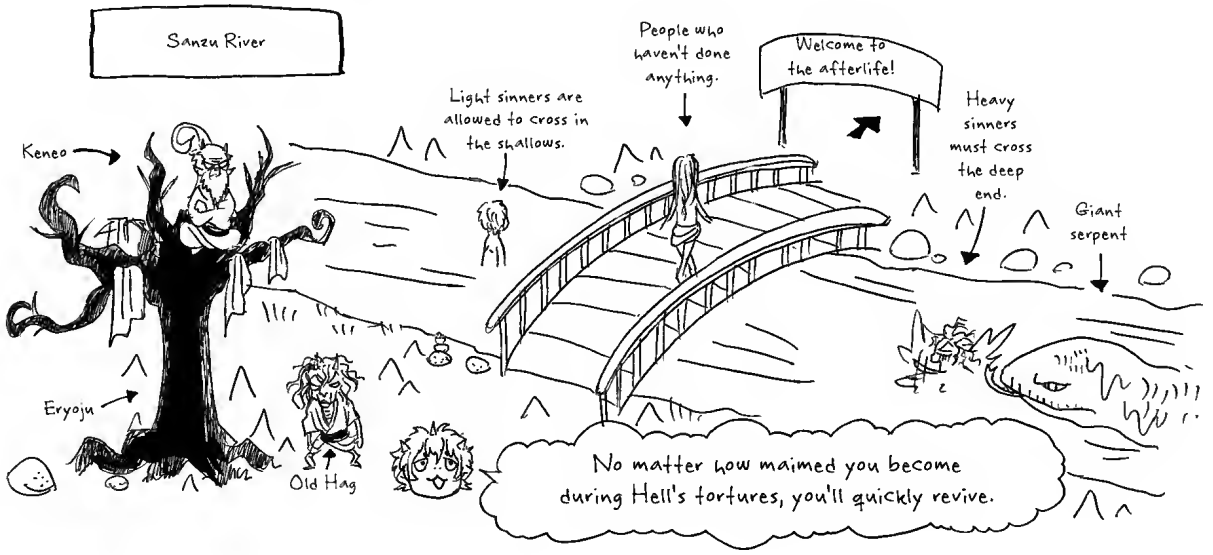

Sanzu River
People who haven't done anything.
Welcome to the afterlife!
Light sinners are allowed to cross in the shallows.
Heavy sinners must cross the deep end.
Giant serpent
Keneo
Eryoju
Old Hag
No matter how maimed you become during Hell's tortures, you'll quickly revive.

## "Hell's Affairs and This and That"

I received an honorable mention in the Tetsuya Chiba Award for this work.

Along with it, I included two other stories featuring different protagonists in a three-chapter omnibus.

Its title at the time was An Extraordinarily Normal Tale.

Until then I sent it to as many magazines as I could, but regrettably fell into a pattern of getting past the first round for small awards, only to have the editor say, "I like it, but..." and nothing come of it.

I planned to look for another job if the same thing happened again, but to think it would lead to my serialization. I'm very grateful.

I was surprised just how much my art has changed since I first drew this story. There are a number of other laughable parts beside the art, but without this story I wouldn't be where I am now so it's close to my heart. I hope you'll read it.

Satan = Goat + Bat + Bodybuilder

I remember wanting to make easy to understand characters in order to get the theme across in only 15 pages.

His thick fur covers up his nakedness fashionably.

Back then, I got a lot of feedback from people who thought Hozuki was a woman. I tried to increase his masculinity, but it only ended up being a slight difference. Sorry.

HELL'S AFFAIRS AND THIS AND THAT
BONUS CHAPTER

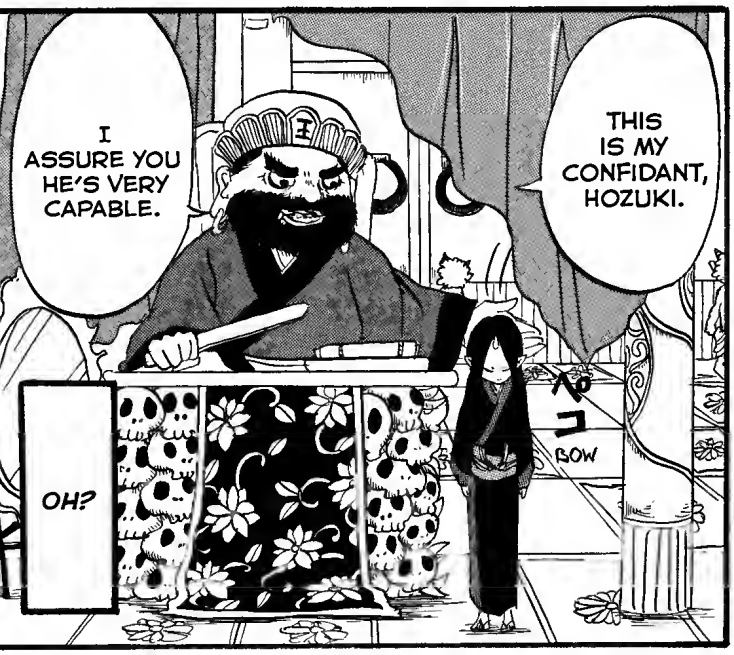
I'VE COME TO VISIT JAPAN'S HELL TODAY.
I AM SATAN, LORD OF WESTERN HELL.

AS IF A SMALL ASIAN NATION COULD BE FILLED WITH ANYTHING BUT PEACEFUL FOOLS.
OH! WHY, THANK YOU.
HERE'S A LITTLE SOMETHING.
SOMEDAY I SHALL BRING EASTERN HELL UNDER MY JURISDICTION, AS WELL.

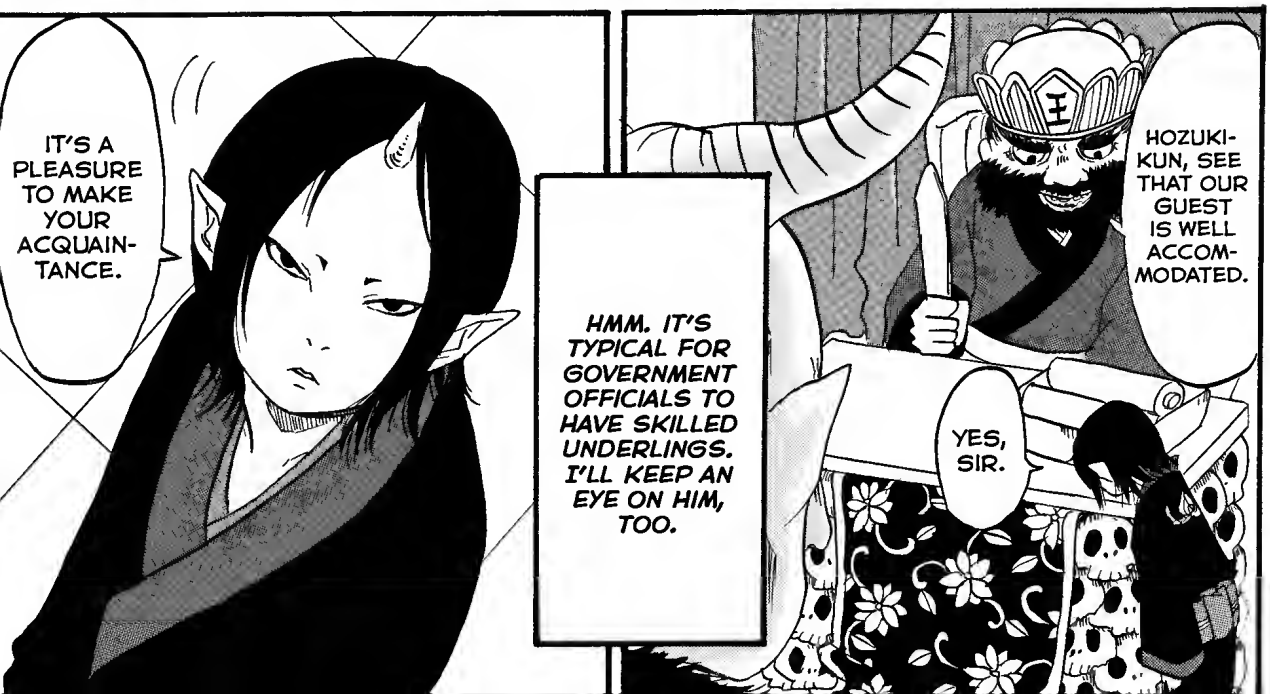
I'M SORRY TO IMPOSE LIKE THIS OUT OF THE BLUE.
WHAT A LETDOWN.

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY. WELCOME.
THIS IS ENMA.
JUST LOOK AT HIM. HE'S SOFT TO THE CORE.
SHOPPE GUILLOTINE

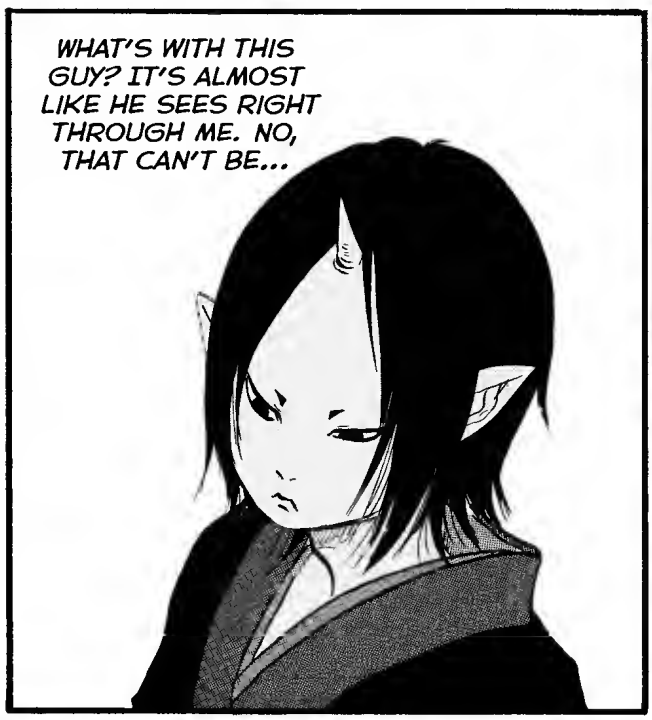
壱
HMPH. I'M HERE FOR RECON. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO SHOWS ME AROUND.
MY SUBORDINATE WILL ACT AS YOUR GUIDE.
I'D LOVE TO SIT DOWN AND CHAT, BUT I'M UP TO MY NECK IN WORK.


I ASSURE YOU HE'S VERY CAPABLE.
THIS IS MY CONFIDANT, HOZUKI.
OH?
BOW

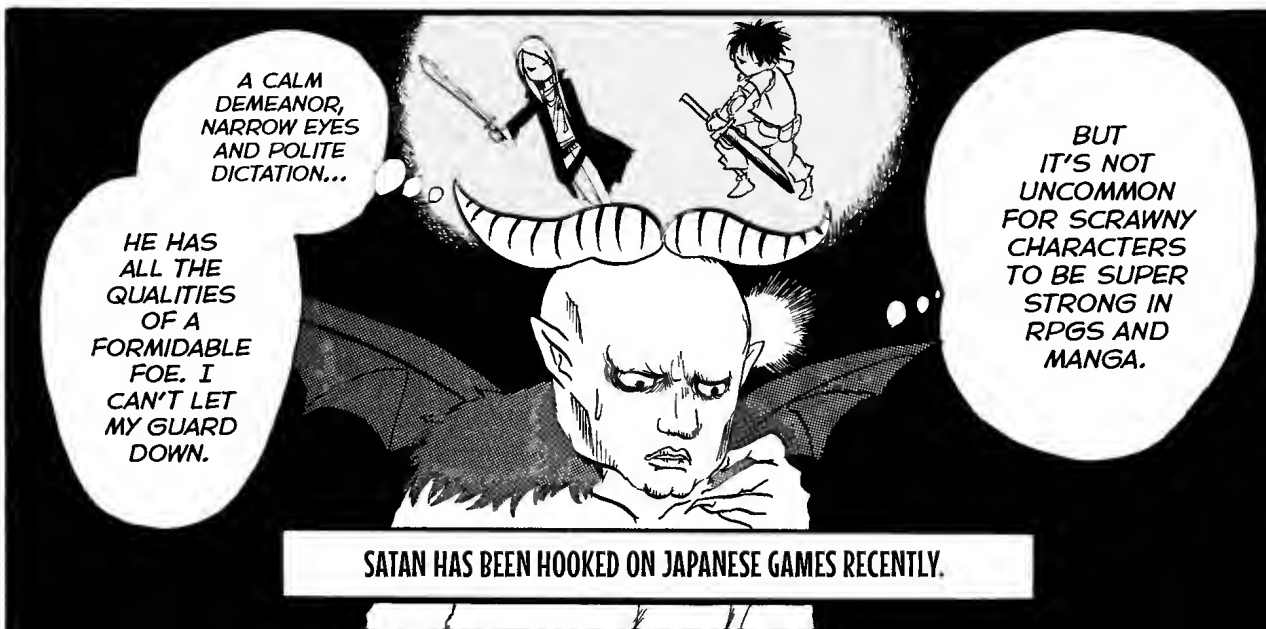
FEEL FREE TO TAKE A LOOK AT OUR FACILITIES.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME TWICE.

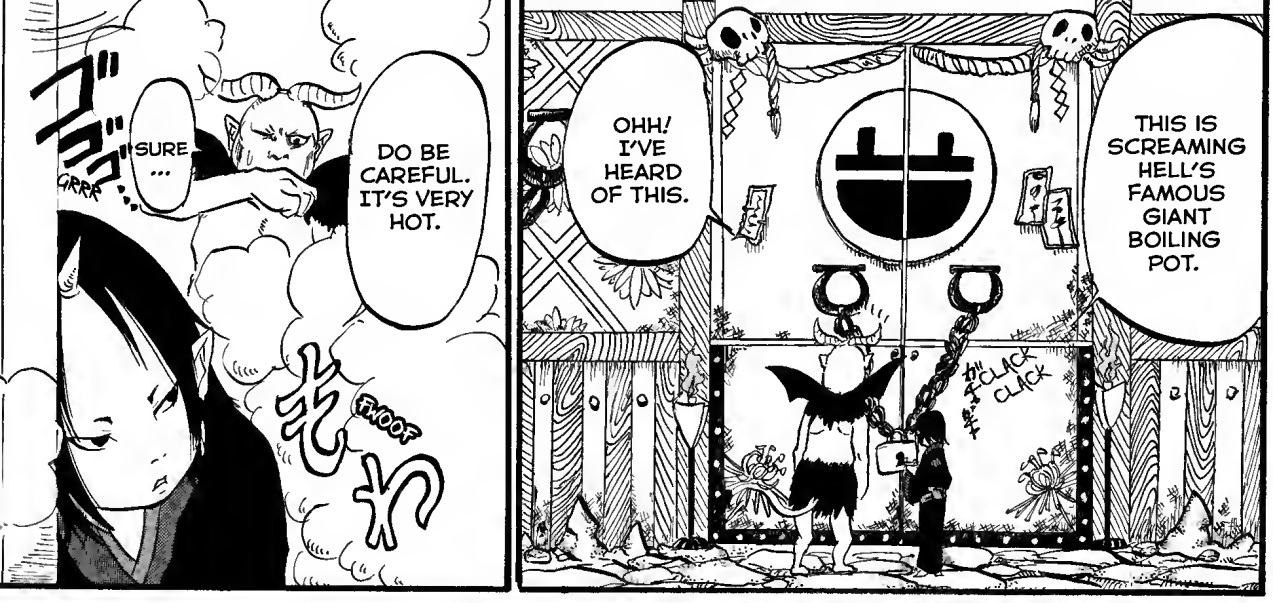

IT'S A PLEASURE TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAIN-TANCE.
HMM. IT'S TYPICAL FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO HAVE SKILLED UNDERLINGS. I'LL KEEP AN EYE ON HIM, TOO.
HOZUKI-KUN, SEE THAT OUR GUEST IS WELL ACCOM-MODATED.
YES, SIR.

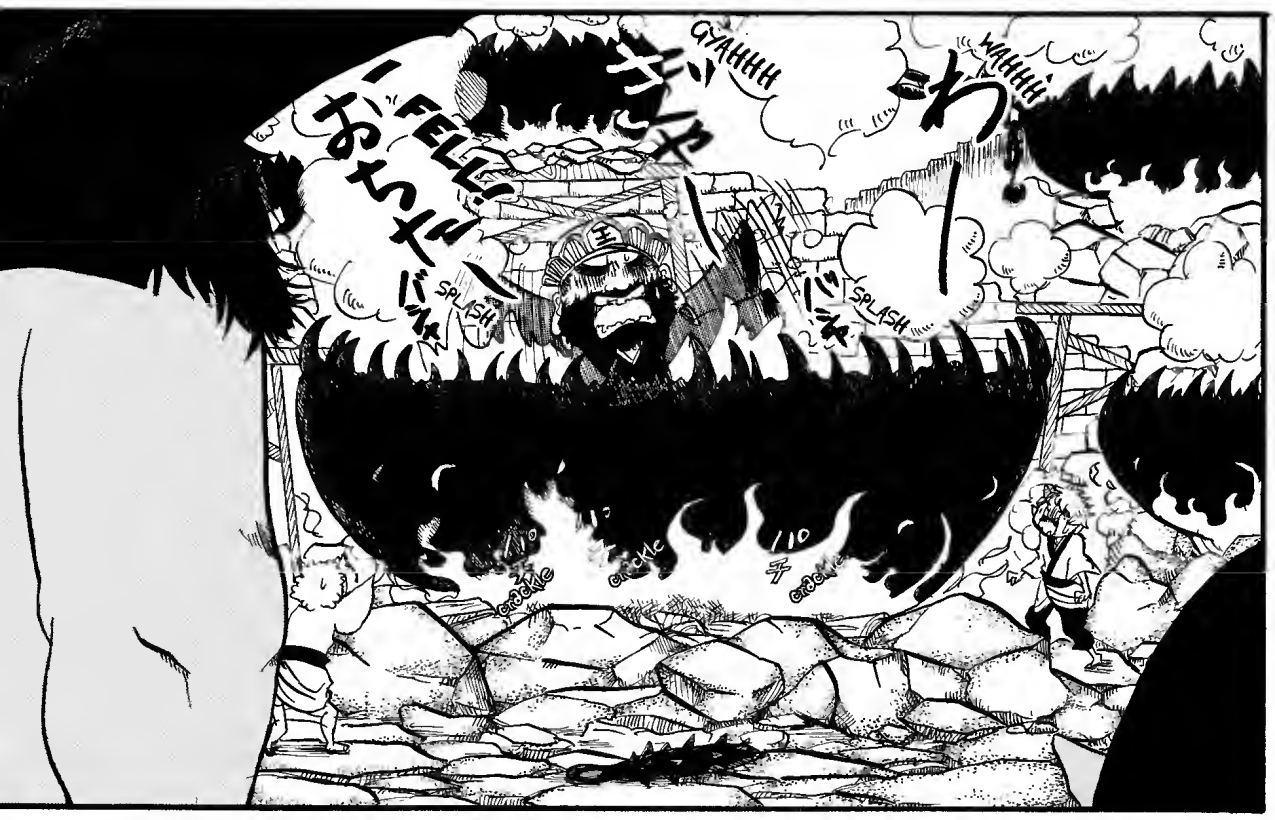
LIKE THE GREEN GIANT.
YOU'RE AWFULLY TALL, SATAN-SAMA.
HUH...?
FWOO
TWITCH
HE'S PRETTY SCRAWNY FOR A DEMON. I COULD SNAP HIM IN TWO.
HMPH.


WHAT'S WITH THIS GUY? IT'S ALMOST LIKE HE SEES RIGHT THROUGH ME. NO, THAT CAN'T BE...

I MUST SEEM VERY SMALL TO YOU.
UHH... YEAH, I GUESS.
TWITCH
TWITCH


A CALM DEMEANOR, NARROW EYES AND POLITE DICTATION...
HE HAS ALL THE QUALITIES OF A FORMIDABLE FOE. I CAN'T LET MY GUARD DOWN.
BUT IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR SCRAWNY CHARACTERS TO BE SUPER STRONG IN RPGS AND MANGA.
SATAN HAS BEEN HOOKED ON JAPANESE GAMES RECENTLY.


DO BE CAREFUL. IT'S VERY HOT.
SURE...
GRRR
TWOOF
THIS IS SCREAMING HELL'S FAMOUS GIANT BOILING POT.
OHH! I'VE HEARD OF THIS.
CLACK CLACK

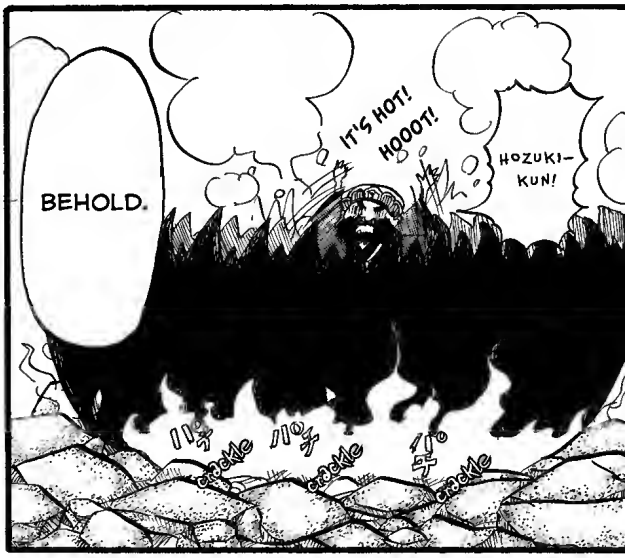

I FELL!
SPLASH
GYAHHHH
WAHHHH
SPLASH
crackle
crackle
crackle

AH! HOZUKI-KUN! GOOD TIMING! HELP MEEE!

HEY...

I-IS HE GONNA BE ALL RIGHT?!

BEFORE YOU IS THE ONE AND ONLY...
HOZUKI-KUN! HELP!

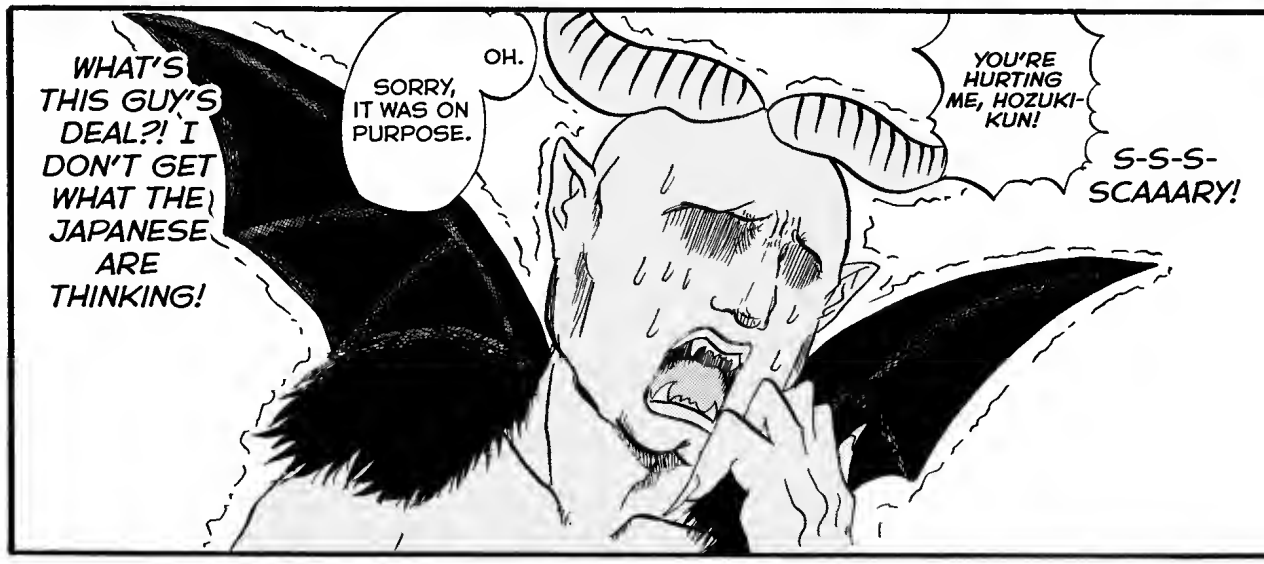

BEHOLD.
IT'S HOT! HOOOT!
HOZUKI-KUN!
crackle
crackle
crackle

STOP CALMLY EXPLAINING THE SITU-ATION AND GET ME OUT!
LORD ENMA HIMSELF.

IT SEEMS THE TIME HAS COME FOR LORD ENMA TO PAY THE PIPER.
TCH
I'M SORRY! PLEASE HELP ME!
WHAT A SLOVENLY SIGHT TO SHOW OUR GUEST. DO YOUR BEST TO GET OUT YOURSELF FOR THE FUTURE.
THERE WON'T BE A FUTURE AT THIS RATE! GET OVER HERE AND HELP ME!
UGH... SORRY. I SLIPPED.
SPLOOSH
THIS SHOULD MAKE FOR SOME GOOD ENMA BROTH.
WHAT'S WITH THESE TWO?! NOT ONLY DID ENMA LET IT SLIDE BY LIKE IT WAS NOTHING...
WHOA. HE'S TOTALLY FINE...
...HIS SUBORDINATES ARE CRAZY! I'D CRY IF MY UNDERLINGS TREATED ME LIKE THAT! THAT'S WAY TOO HARSH!

YES, SIR!
DO IT LIKE SO!
THERE IS NO ROOM FOR MERCY AMONG DEMONS!
H-HEY! HOZUKI-KUN...
WHACK

YOU THREE! DON'T SLACK OFF! PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT!
EEK!


WHAT'S THIS GUY'S DEAL?! I DON'T GET WHAT THE JAPANESE ARE THINKING!
OH.
SORRY, IT WAS ON PURPOSE.
YOU'RE HURTING ME, HOZUKI-KUN!
S-S-S-SCAAARY!

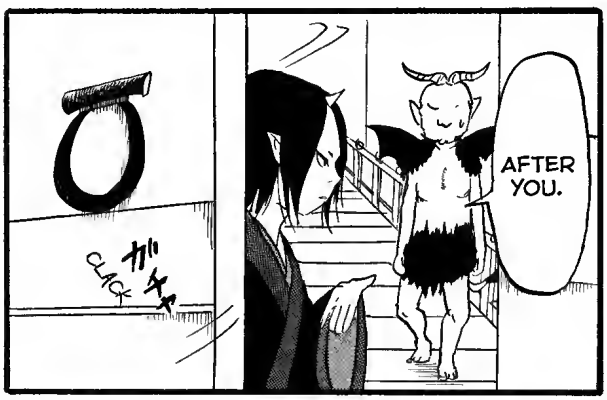
HUH?! WHAT'S UP?!
SATAN-SAMA.
SNAP
MY APOLOGIES FOR THE INTERRUPTION. LET US BE ON WITH THE TOUR.

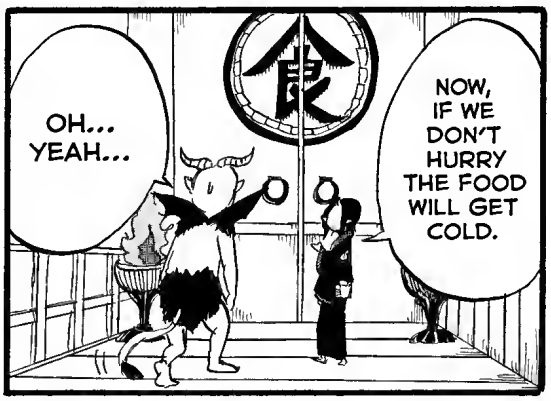
I SHOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN SO MAD AT THEM FOR DELETING MY FF SAVE FILE.
We're so sorry!
What have you done?!
AHH... THE DEMONS AT HOME ARE ANGELS IN COMPARISON.
Total Domination
SATAN-SAMA?

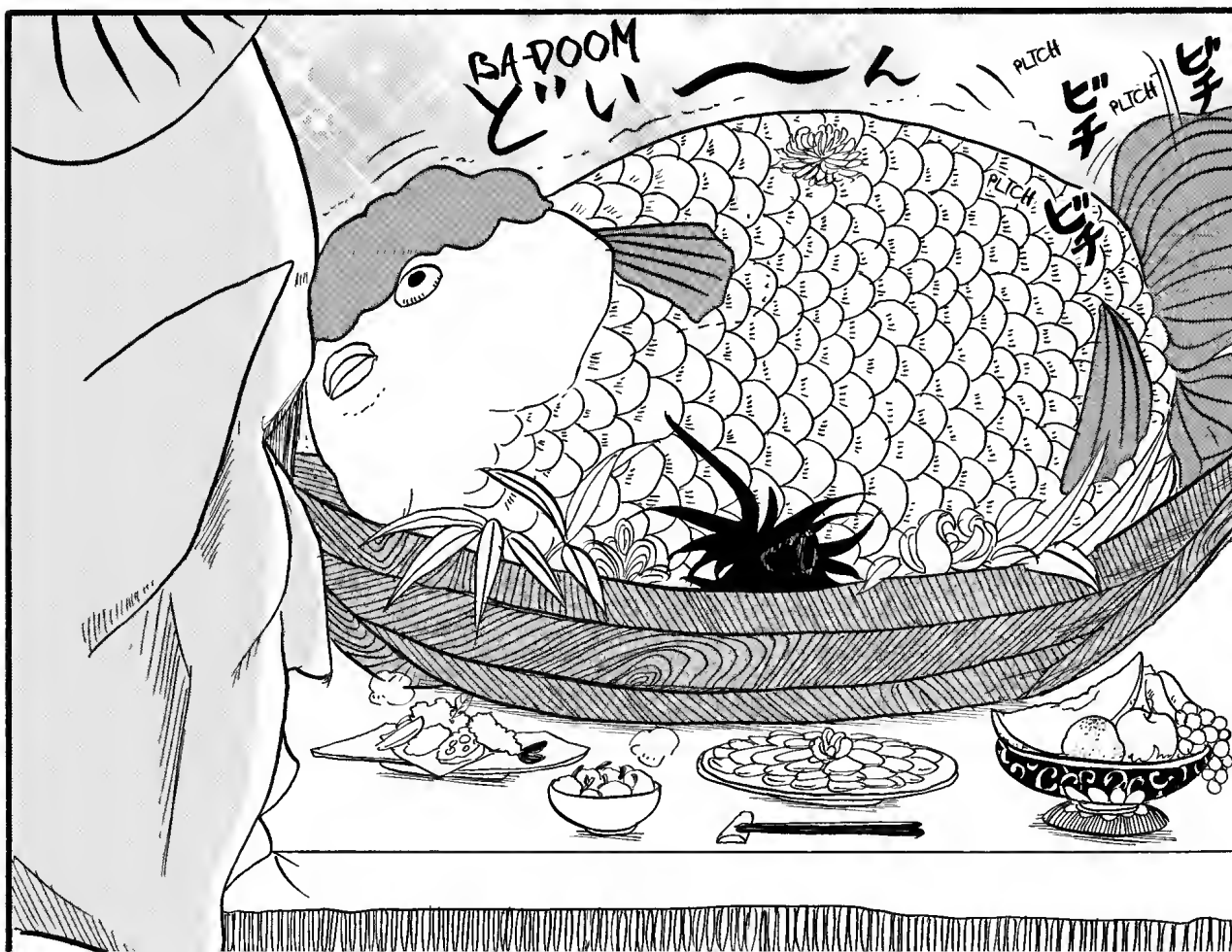
...
I'VE HAD THE COOKS PREPARE FOOD.
OH... THAT'S VERY KIND OF YOU.
PLITCH
ビチ
RUSTLE
WHAT ARE THOSE? THEY'RE SHAKING...
OH...
YES?
UHH...
GOLDFISH PLANTS.
THESE ARE GOLDFISH PLANTS?!
THEY'RE A DECORATIVE PET. I BRED THEM IN MY SPARE TIME.
EEEEEK! WHO WOULD KEEP SOMETHING LIKE THIS?!
WAVE
SHIVER

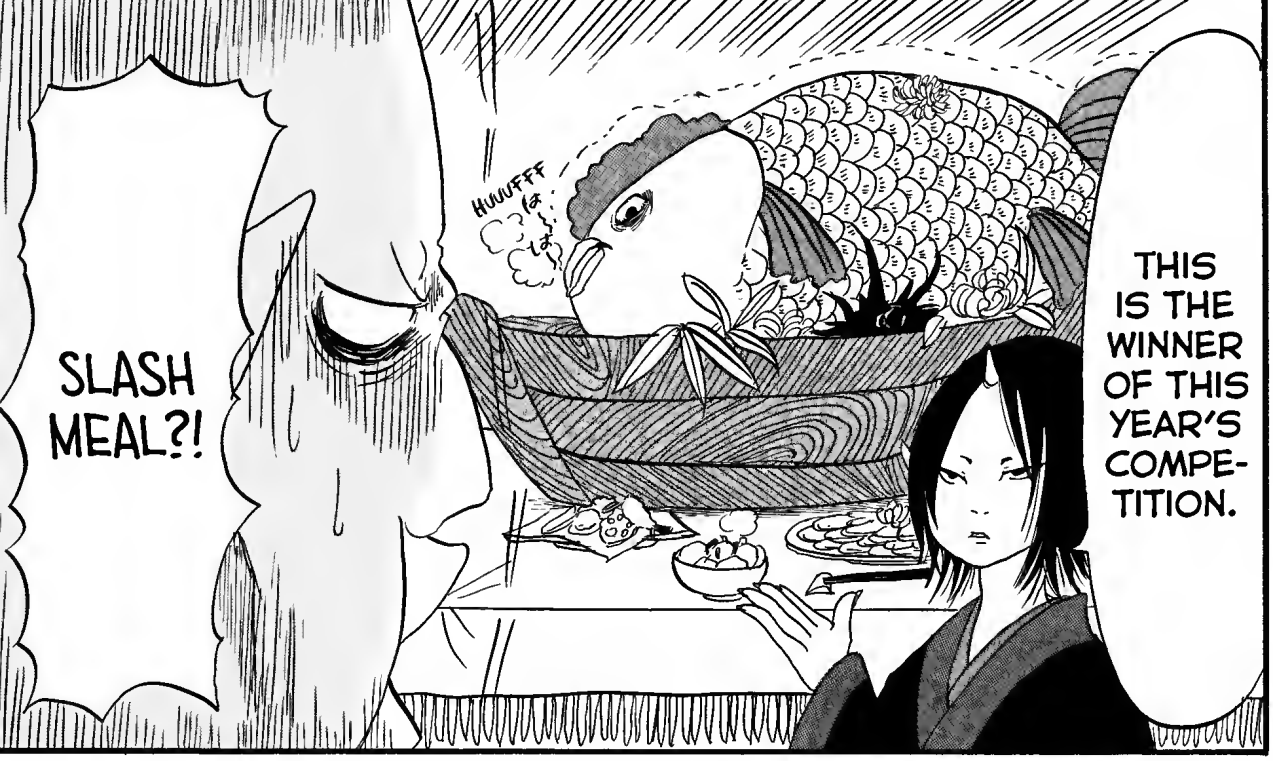
Nice!
Hey!
wow!
THERE ARE PLENTY OF ODD CONTESTS IN THE WEST, AREN'T THERE?
OOF... I CAN'T DENY THAT.
WIFE-CARRYING RACE

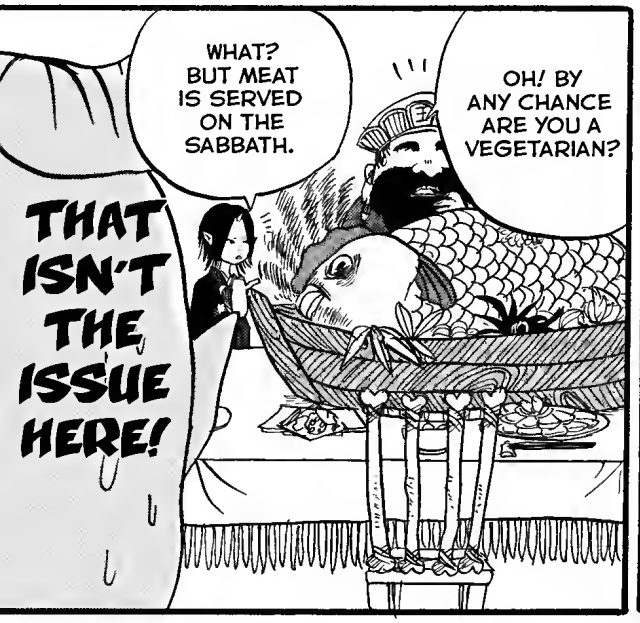
THEY'RE THAT POPL-ULAR?!
YOU EASTERNERS MAKE A COMPETITION OUT OF ANYTHING!
She's a beaut!
THERE'S A COMPETITION FOR WHO CAN GROW THE TALLEST ONE.
FLUB FLUB

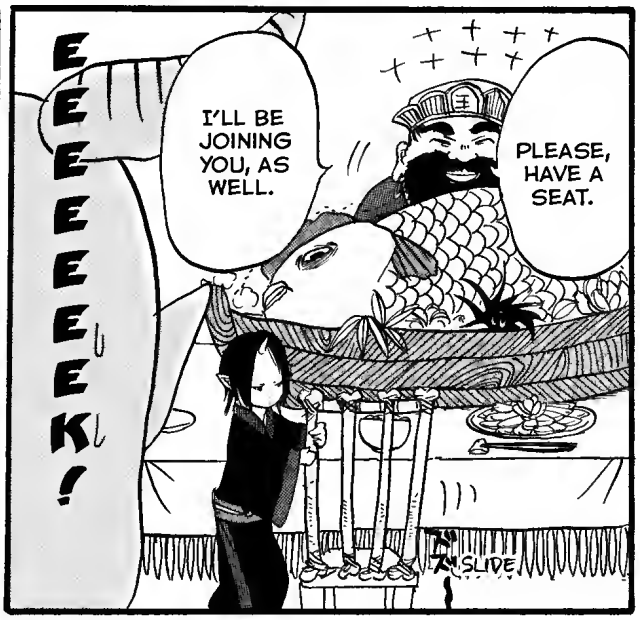

AFTER YOU.
CLICK
ガチャ


OH... YEAH...
NOW, IF WE DON'T HURRY THE FOOD WILL GET COLD.


BA-DOOM
どぃ〜ん
PLICH
ビチ
PLICH
ビチ
PLICH
ビチ

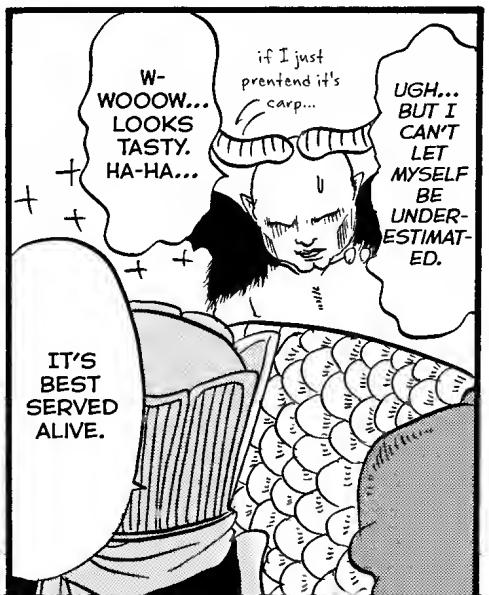

THIS IS THE WINNER OF THIS YEAR'S COMPETITION.
HUUUFFF
SLASH MEAL?!

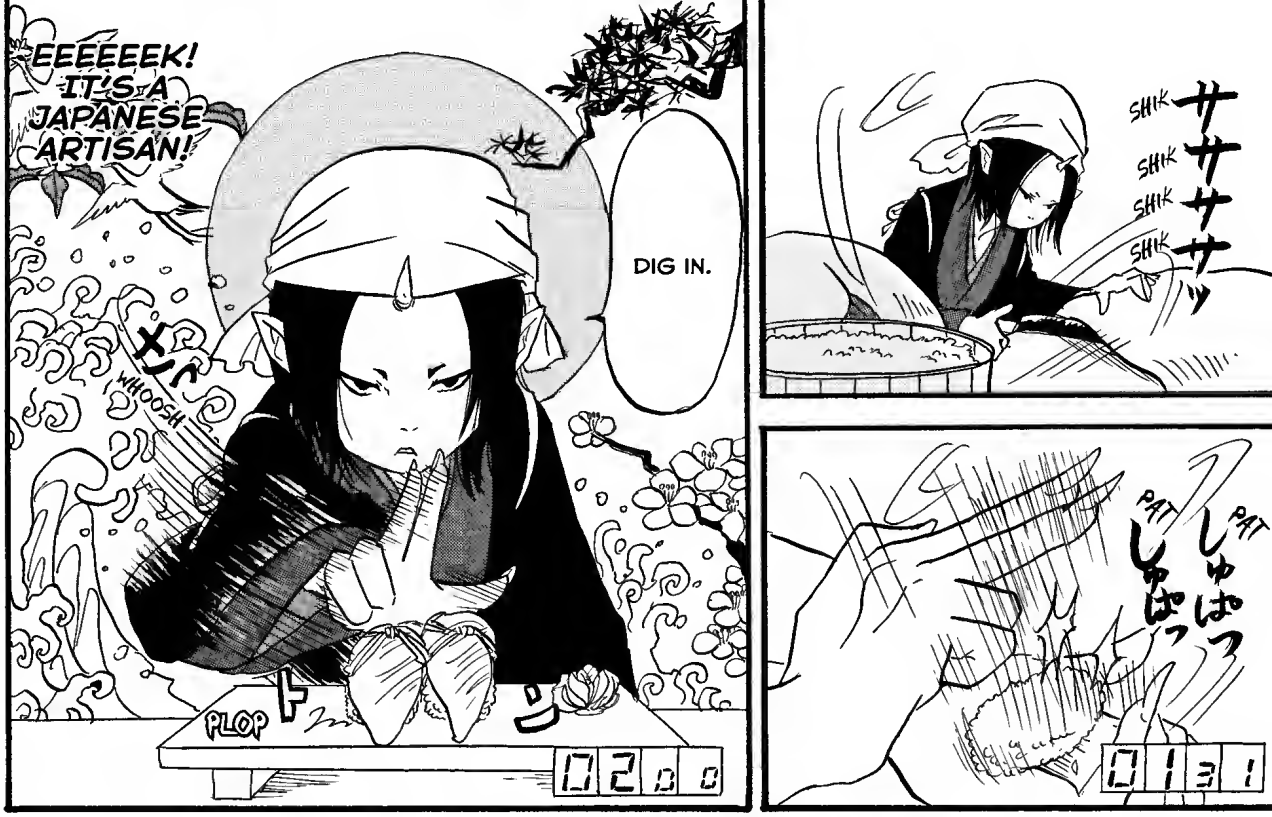

WHAT? BUT MEAT IS SERVED ON THE SABBATH.
OH! BY ANY CHANCE ARE YOU A VEGETARIAN?
THAT ISN'T THE ISSUE HERE!

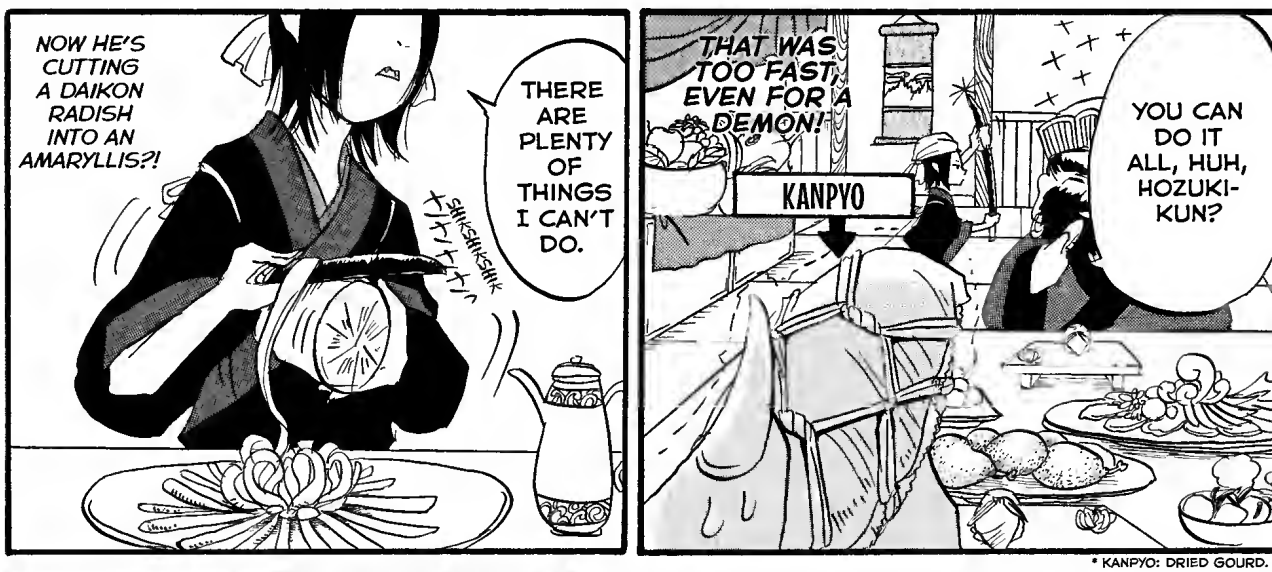

EEEEEEEEK!
I'LL BE JOINING YOU, AS WELL.
PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT.
SLIDE

WIPE
NEXT, I'LL SHOW YOU JAPAN'S FAMOUS BUTCHER SHOW.

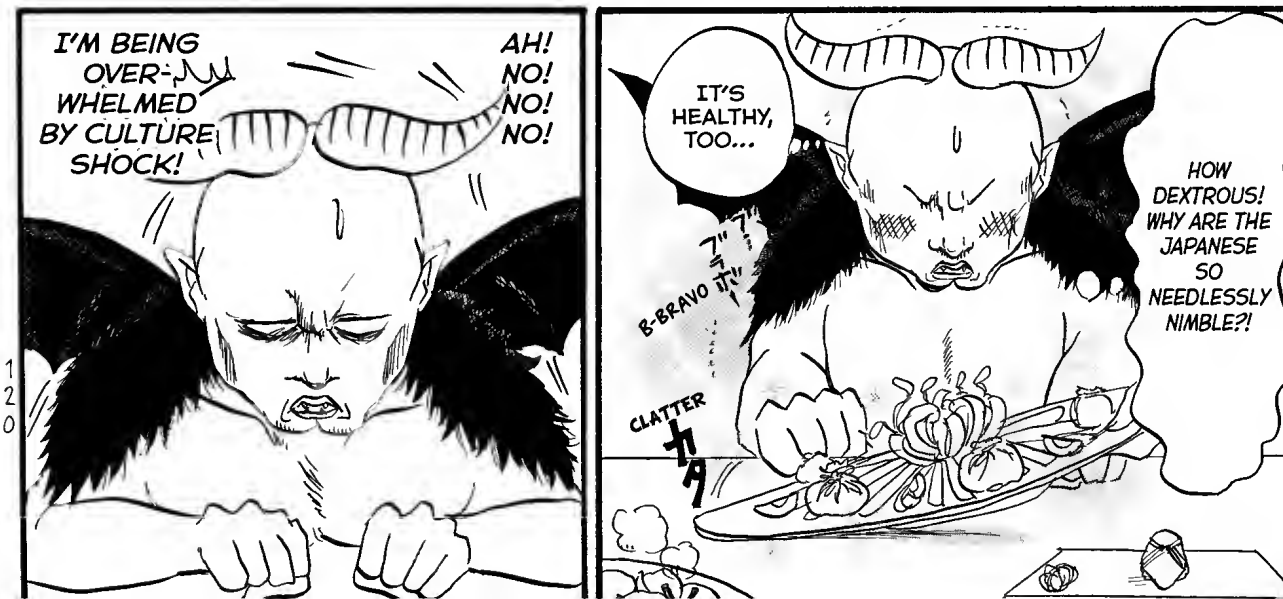
SLASH

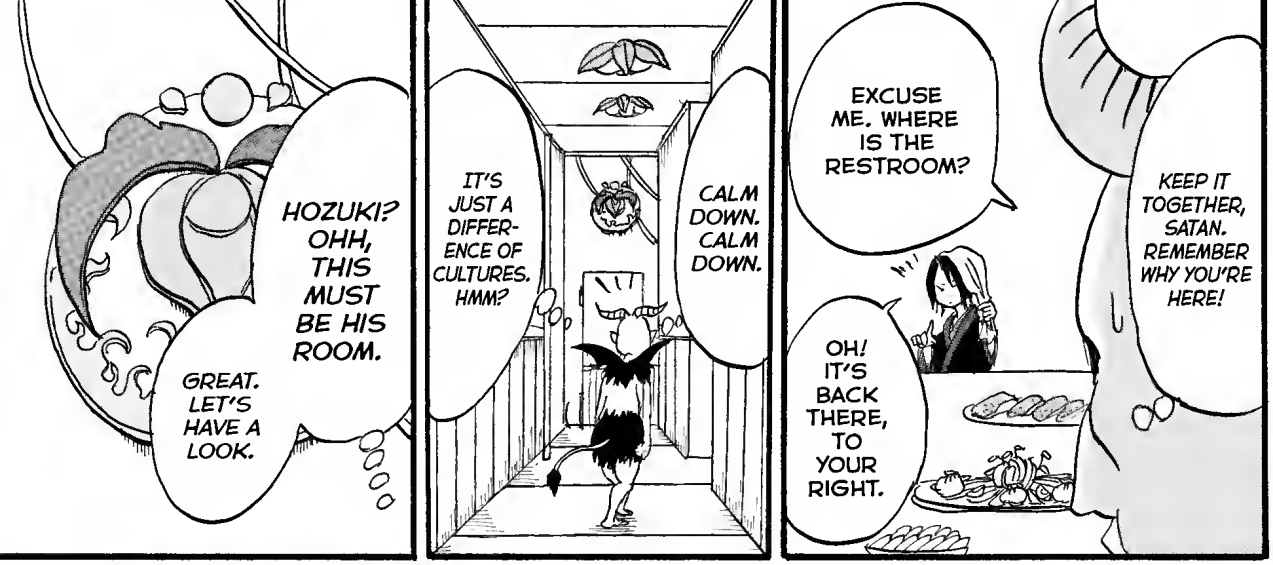

W-WOOOW... LOOKS TASTY. HA-HA...
if I just pretend it's carp...
UGH... BUT I CAN'T LET MYSELF BE UNDER-ESTIMAT-ED.
IT'S BEST SERVED ALIVE.

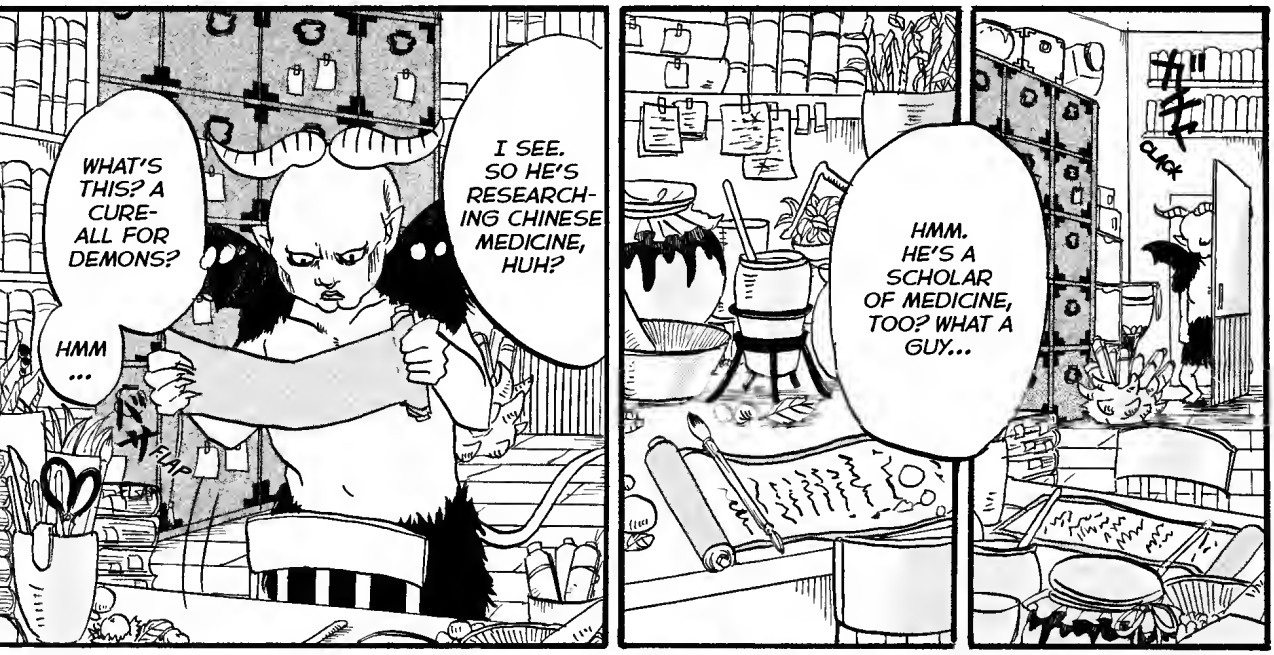


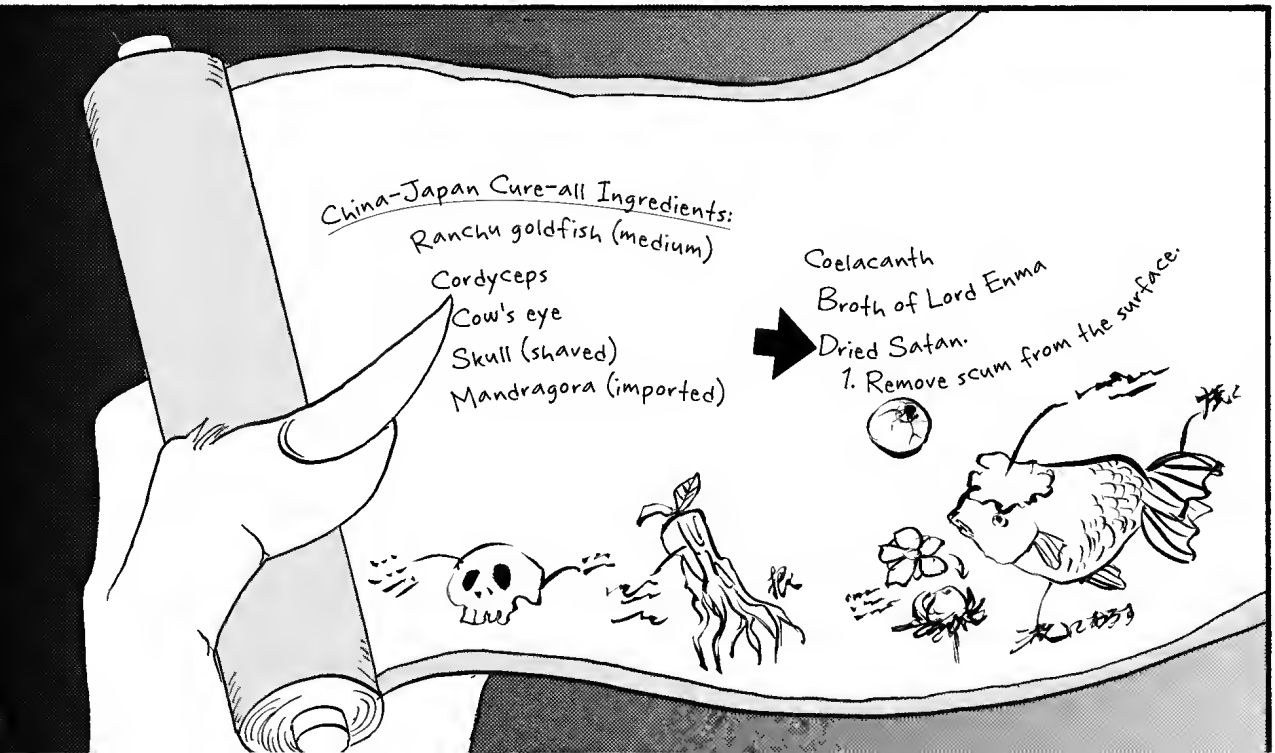


NOW HE'S CUTTING A DAIKON RADISH INTO AN AMARYLLIS?!
THERE ARE PLENTY OF THINGS I CAN'T DO.
SHKSHKSHK
THAT WAS TOO FAST, EVEN FOR A DEMON!
KANPYO
YOU CAN DO IT ALL, HUH, HOZUKI-KUN?

* KANPYO: DRIED GOURD.


I'M BEING OVER-WHELMED BY CULTURE SHOCK!
AH! NO! NO! NO!
IT'S HEALTHY, TOO...
B-BRAVO ブー
CLATTER
HOW DEXTROUS! WHY ARE THE JAPANESE SO NEEDLESSLY NIMBLE?!

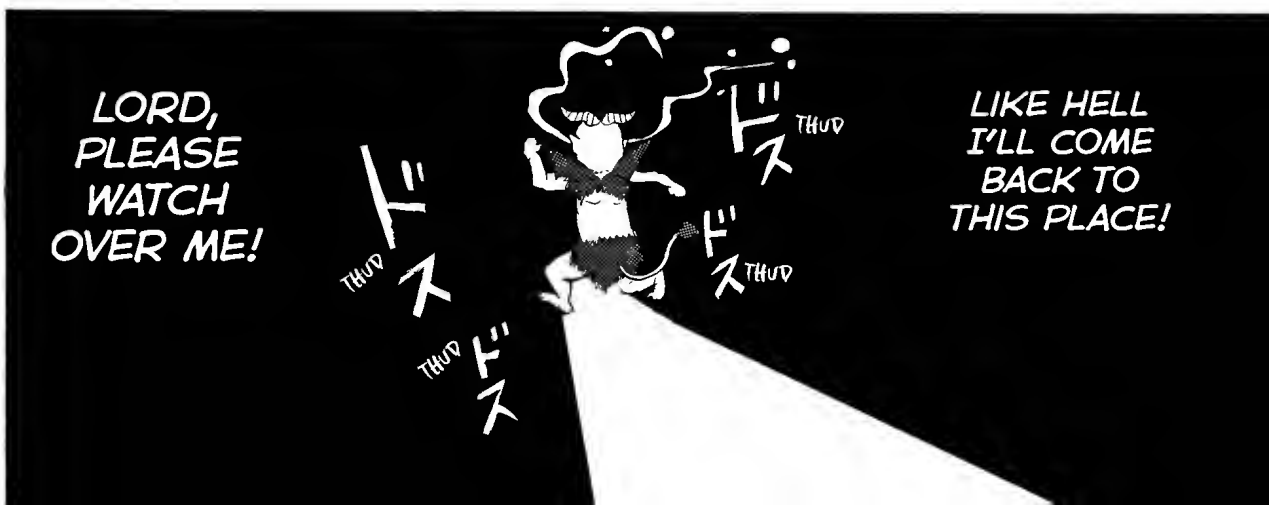

HOZUKI? OHH, THIS MUST BE HIS ROOM.
GREAT. LET'S HAVE A LOOK.
IT'S JUST A DIFFERENCE OF CULTURES. HMM?
CALM DOWN. CALM DOWN.
EXCUSE ME. WHERE IS THE RESTROOM?
OH! IT'S BACK THERE, TO YOUR RIGHT.
KEEP IT TOGETHER, SATAN. REMEMBER WHY YOU'RE HERE!


WHAT'S THIS? A CURE-ALL FOR DEMONS?
HMM...
FLAP
I SEE. SO HE'S RESEARCHING CHINESE MEDICINE, HUH?
HMM. HE'S A SCHOLAR OF MEDICINE, TOO? WHAT A GUY...
CLICK


China-Japan Cure-all Ingredients:
Ranchu goldfish (medium)
Cordyceps
Cow's eye
Skull (shaved)
Mandragora (imported)
Coelacanth
Broth of Lord Enma
Dried Satan.
1. Remove scum from the surface.

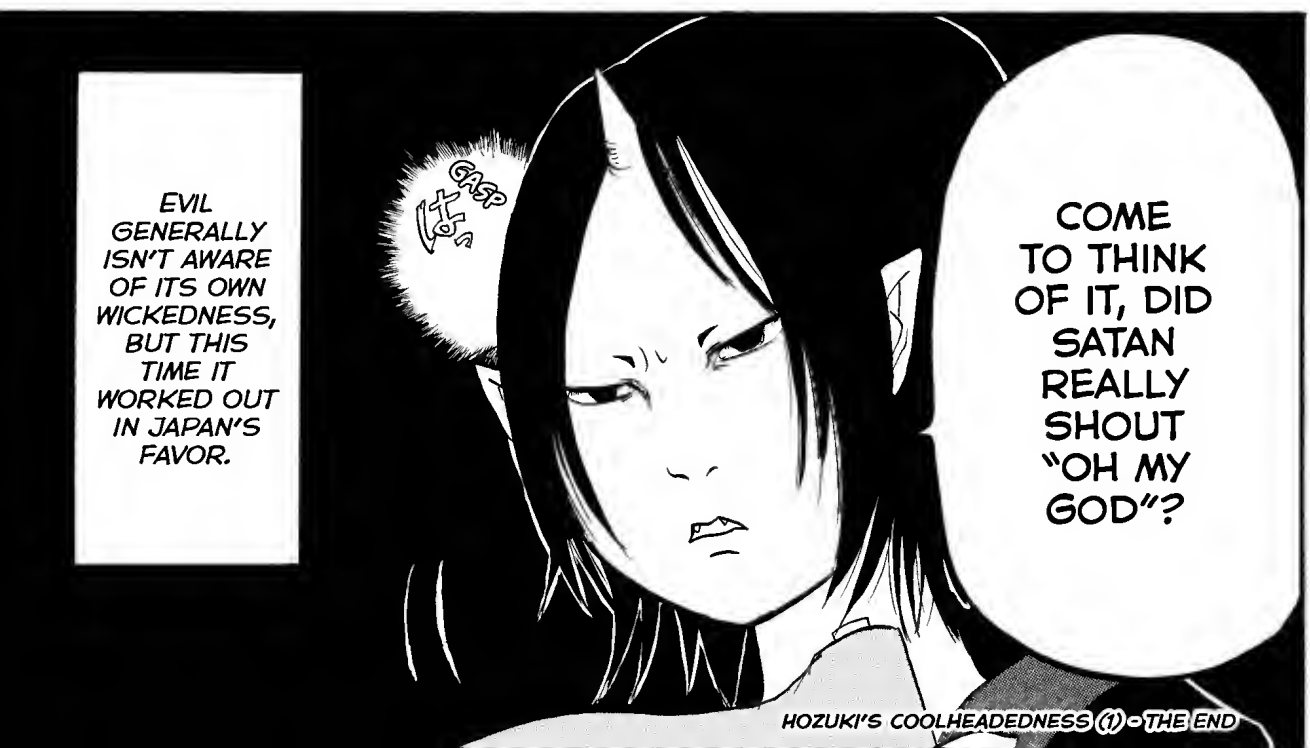
H-
H-
H-
HE...
オギャ
Wahh!
HE'S GONNA TURN ME INTO JERKY!

OH MY GOD!
うおおおおおおお!
OH! LEAVING ALREADY?
CHARCOAL GRILL
DO COME AGAIN.
EEEEEEEK!


LORD, PLEASE WATCH OVER ME!
ドス THUD
ドス THUD
ドス THUD
LIKE HELL I'LL COME BACK TO THIS PLACE!

HM?
HE MUST BE HOMESICK.
AND I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GRILL THE GOLDFISH...

OH!
THERE'S A SPELLING ERROR.
IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE SANTA, NOT SATAN.
FWIP
WHAT IN THE WORLD WAS SATAN-SAMA READING?


EVIL GENERALLY ISN'T AWARE OF ITS OWN WICKEDNESS, BUT THIS TIME IT WORKED OUT IN JAPAN'S FAVOR.
GASP
COME TO THINK OF IT, DID SATAN REALLY SHOUT "OH MY GOD"?

# Afterword

Thank you very much for reading until the end. A lot, but I can't express how glad I am to see the first book published. I'd like to thank all the readers and people who helped me along the way.

As far back as I can remember, I've always been reading books about the afterlife and yokai. Making copies of old picture books and encyclopedias was my hobby. When I had spare time after tests, I'd draw foxes and tanuki in the margins of my answer sheet. Afterward my teacher asked me, "Is this a dog or a cat?", which left me a bit bitter. From then on, I paid even more attention to the different builds and characteristics of animals.

And with the knowledge of those characteristics in hand, I grew to understand that mystical beasts and yokai are mostly combinations or exaggerations of different animals, with some ironically modeled after humans, too. For instance, hannya masks portray the angry face of a woman exaggerated to look demonic and scary. Who knows? Nurarihyon might have been based on someone the creator knew in the neighborhood. I believe that the definition of manga "characters" and expression share the same roots.

Our ancestors used such irony and jokes as a form of self-admonition. "If you do bad things then you'll go to hell." I think that warning is a concentrated form of Japanese wisdom.

...Or so I'd like to say, but my manga isn't so grand as to make such arrogant claims. But I do continue to draw with that idea in mind.

If I may talk about a personal matter for a moment, my grandmother on my father's side passed away shortly before my serialization started. When Hell's Affairs and This and That was published, she told me, "I don't really understand the story but I bought a copy of the magazine." I wonder if she can read this story in the afterlife, too. Would the afterlife's Morning be during the dead of night, I wonder? But even if she read it, I suspect she'd tell me "I don't get it," anyway. I'd like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to my grandmother. Thank you.

Natsumi Eguchi

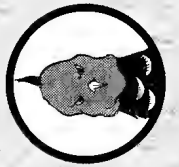
* MORNING IS THE MAGAZINE THE COMIC WAS SERIALIZED IN.

# IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF HOZUKI'S CHOOLHEADEDNESS...

STARS OF THE HORROR WORLD, IEMON & OIWA, MAKE AN APPEARANCE!

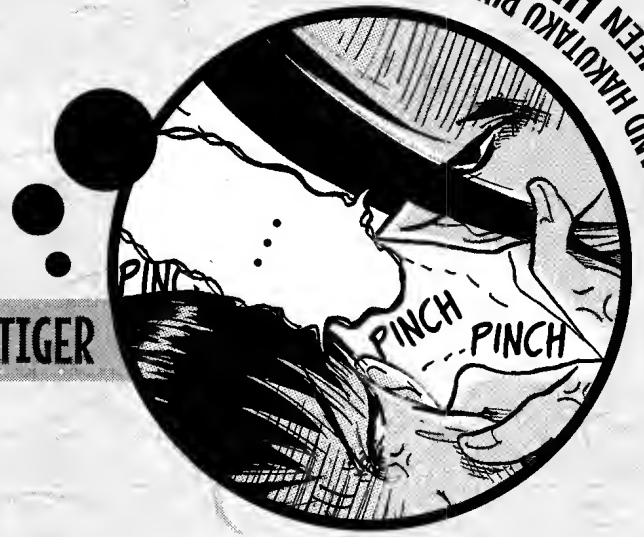
## HELL'S YOTSUYA TAXI KAIDAN

...VISIT HOZUKI'S ROOM!



## THREE DEAD ANIMALS!

## DUET OF THE DRAGON AND THE TIGER




HOZUKI AND HAKUTAKU BUMP HEADS AT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL!

HOZUKI PRODUCTIONS!
AN EVEN CRUELER SPORTS FESTIVAL!

## A MENTAL SPORTS FESTIVAL

## CATPARAZZI

THE WRITER (CAT) OF A THIRD-RATE GOSSIP MAG SETS HIS SIGHTS ON HOZUKI!

## HELL IDOL

CLUELESS ABOUT HOZUKI, HELL'S AIRHEAD IDOL JOINS THE MIX!

"Hell's Affairs and This and That" chapter 2 is also included!

PLEASE LOOK FORWARD TO...

# ...THESE SIX CHAPTERS

HOZUKI'S COOLHEADEDNESS VOLUME 2 IS NOW ON SALE!

**Hozuki's Cool-headedness 1**

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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